

How can art change the meaning of the city?: An examination
of an installation in a public setting, Compton Court, M.I.T.

by

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HOW CAN ART CHANGE THE MEANING OF THE CITY?

AN EXAMINATION OF AN INSTALLATION IN A PUBLIC SETTING, COMPTON COURT, M.I.T

by

DIANE ALEXANDRA SHAMASH

Submitted to the Department of Architecture
on May 5th, 1981 in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Science in
Visual Studies

ABSTRACT

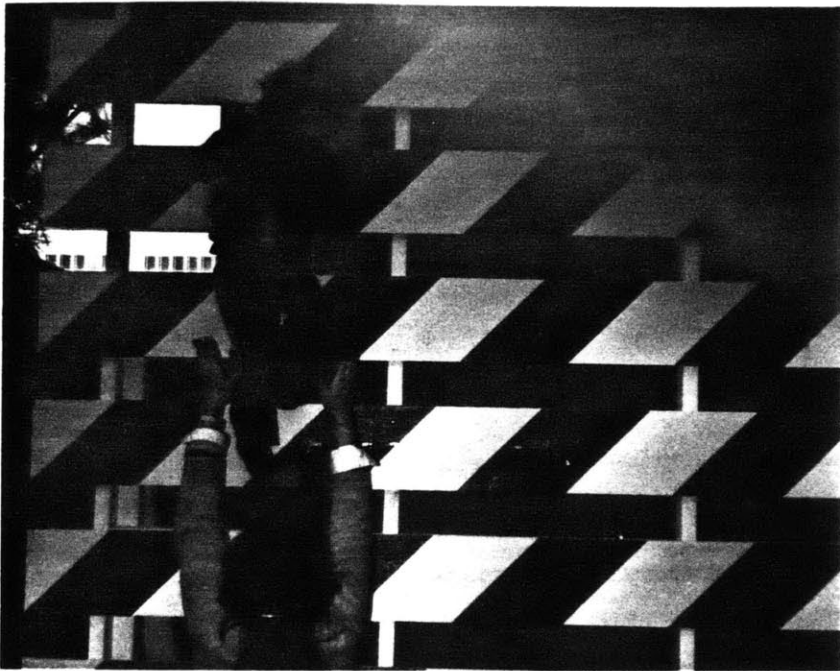
In the last few years there has been a shift towards an interdisciplinary questioning of the urban environment, which has included planning, architecture, design and the fine arts. Although each discipline has approached the urban environment with a given set of assumptions based on its own history, a larger question has seemed to emerge: how can we make our cities more habitable, more social, more meaningful? Artists have sought definitions outside their own history including philosophical, sociological and scientific theories; planners and architects have also looked towards definitions of the urban environment which have included theories of perception and cognition. Sculptors are challenging the assigned role to public institutions, in terms of the work's symbology and meaning. Planners are questioning the value of their work based upon the lived perceptions of people on its streets. This shared questioning indicates the possibility of new directions for both environmental design and environmental art: sculpture, architecture, design; a joint history?

Thesis Supervisor: Muriel Cooper

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PUBLIC ART

public art



Diane Shamash

Visible Language Workshop

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PREFACE

I began this thesis with a series of essays on public art, intended for readers who might be unfamiliar with the subject. They are also intended for other artists, designers, planners and architects concerned with the quality of art in their cities, and the quality of the public environment. This thesis is concerned with the attributes of a social and participatory art, and as such, it is a framework for my own activity as an artist. It questions the historical precedents for public art, art patronage systems, and some directions of recent work.

I am indebted to the many artists, some of them mentioned here, who make this statement strong through their present examples. I especially thank my former teachers Siah Armajani and Kinji Akagawa in Minneapolis, MN for their continued support of my activities. I also wish to acknowledge Marcia Tucker at the New Museum in New York City, who in producing exhibitions such as "Fashion Moda" (1980), and "Bad Painting" (1978), has helped provide the museum institution with new content. The questions raised by Kevin Lynch 25 years ago have informed and affected many of the current attitudes in planning and design. The continued efforts of these and other individuals have made it possible for me to raise the questions of my thesis, and point to a future joint effort between the disciplines.

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I would like to re-examine the role of public art, and to introduce a different understanding of the "public". This thesis is a statement about the need for a more communicable and social art; one which is capable of engaging a city's people. It's interest is in how an official and representational art can be replaced with a culturally diverse and experiential one.

Public art has been traditionally linked to public institutions, the state and commercial industries. These institutions have for the most part, determined the symbology of the work and restricted its interpretations. It is difficult to separate the public monument from the cause it represents, the public sculpture from the building it adorns, public art from the individual producer. Public art functions either to glorify state ideals, official events, or more recently, the artist personalities who produce the work. The public monuments are marked by their inability to perform as anything other than illustrative, decorative, or allegorical statues to historic or personal events. They stop short of involving individuals with their environment. Only recently, with the emergence of publically funded arts organizations, are culturally diverse voices heard. "FASHION MODA", a collaborative from the South Bronx in New York City, creates an important precedent by bringing the graffiti, the local and the ethnic into an understanding of public art. Artists are working to establish a local rather than a universal base; involving and drawing from their immediate communities, rather than engaging universal ideals.

This new direction; the beginning of a local, ethnic and public-conscious art has paralleled a similar development in the applied arts. "Modernism", representing the transcendant and the ideal in both the fine and applied arts, is being replaced with a more humanistic and local understanding of the built environment. Robert Venturi, among other architects presents the American vernacular of the commercial strip and suburban development as an important measure of American values and desires. Venturi insists that the banal, the ordinary, and the narrative provide a valid model for architecture and urban design. Kevin Lynch recognizes the critical need for rich and vivid images in the city environment, which can function to link a personal with a social identity. In providing a theory of "Good City Form", Lynch has inspired artists, as well as architects and planners.

Many artists look towards models in the applied arts: architecture, furniture, graphic, fashion and theatre design to reinvest artistic form with social meaning. By questioning the usefulness and necessity of their work, they search for art's place in individual and social experience. Artists, in redefining a concept of public art, hope to redefine its structure, meaning and context. Art is not looking for a new place in the 'avant-garde', but rather is looking for an aesthetic of daily life.

FASHION MODA

WHAT IS FASHION 时髦 MODA MODA ?

by Joe Lewis

Whether you choose to say Fashion in English, in Chinese 时髦, in Spanish MODA, and/or Russian мода; or say part of it i.e. FASHION MODA, or, if you do a little research and can spit the whole thing out FASHION 时髦 MODA MODA, you are, in one form or another, expressing a concept which people all over the world have worn, for thousands of years.

It is impossible to tell how old this FASHION 时髦 MODA MODA is because its spelling and pronunciation have changed from time to time, from continent to continent; and once you have been in fashion, there's little wonder. Furthermore, what really aerates one's imagination is the fact that the basic elements of fashion reflect the symbols of human existence so well and with such vitality as to transverse the established "cultural aesthetic," which is briefly defined as an invisible item or Ptolemaic system used to elevate "them," circa the beginning of ism's to the present, above the so-called Lean Cats.

FASHION 时髦 MODA MODA provides a sensitive nexus and polylogue between the multifarious ethnocentric groups that live in and/or pass through the stressopolis, New York City, via the South Bronx, an area all too often mistitled, "Criminals Paradise Regained." Fashion spans the very confines of philosophic guilt, space and time, technique, right down to this very moment, right here and now, on earth!

So when one of the neighborhood people comes into Fashion and asks, "What's this place going to be?" Or when confronted by the "Seasoned New Yorker" who says, "I think They get it. . . but. . ." I might lite a cig', scratch my dreadlocks and say, "Take a good look around and come back next week." That's what FASHION 时髦 MODA MODA is all about Bro'.

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENTS: PUBLIC ART

A public art should speak of the moments, memories and images that touch a person's relation to his or her environment. It should enrich the fiber of those images that produce the "city". Rather than look inward, it should create a dialogue. 'Culture' which has been so carefully constructed and guarded should be dismantled, and replaced by an unofficial gathering of cultures. Public art should be localized, not universalized. It should reflect an open and flexible city which reveals the complexity and singularity of its many parts and peoples. Rather than freezing the historical moment to make it real, a public art should replace the glorified representation of the sculptural monument with the experiential image, image, object, event. The finality of the monument is dissolved through change.

Change and diversity should be the basis for this new art. If there is a natural dialectic, there should also be a cultural one. The preservation of an official culture and art serve to continue outlived values and perceptions. A public art therefore, should evolve as does its constituents. In its diversity, art is no longer understood through one culture, but many cultures. It should not reinforce

an official culture, but a spontaneous one. It should not serve, rather explore the nature of personal experience.

The public is not a mass, the public is an individual. It cannot be viewed as an undifferentiated group of people who have determined group needs. The 'public' in Somerville, MA. is different than the 'public' in Minneapolis, MN. is different than the 'public' in New York City. A public is defined through an individual's intimacy with his or her environment and each other. 'Through the naming of this environment, common memories and symbols bind the group together allowing them to communicate.'¹

Finally, a public art is more than art which is outdoors, a monument to a cause, or funded by the state. A public art is more than the biography of its maker. Both the concept of 'public' and the concept of 'public art' need a thorough reinvestigation; an interdisciplinary approach to the built forms that we live in and through.

PART ONE: WHAT IS A PUBLIC ART?

To answer the question of what is a public art, one need but look at the streets to find examples of 19th and 20th century monuments, statues and sculpture which celebrate literally 'scenes from real life'. To cast a monument or statue is to cause an event or person to be perpetually remembered, historically prominent and conspicuous to posterity. A monument is 'proof' of identity; an icon or effigy. These images convey cultural and ideological messages; as civic monuments they instruct and inform their audience. Sculpture is conceived of as an art of solid form, of mass, of spatial occupancy.² Its purpose is to announce heroic dramas, collective aspirations, and leadership. It is especially suited to the duties of the state...the pedestal, so long a permanent fixture of the sculptural object has only recently begun to disappear from sculptural definition.

The question to ask is: what are these 'scenes from real life'? How do they function, and what aspects of daily existence do they commemorate? What sense of time and change do they communicate?

In the 1930's, during the Russian Revolution, Lenin launched a campaign of 'monumental propaganda'. In a letter to Lunacharsky, Lenin explains what his

motives were for the development of a new type of Russian sculpture:

"You remember that Campanella in his City of the Sun speaks of Frescos on the walls of his fantastic socialist city, frescos that were to serve as graphic lessons in natural science, history...I think that this is by no means naive, and with certain modifications could be assimilated by us and realized right now...I would name what I have in mind by "monumental propaganda"...in accordance with this, concise but expressive inscriptions containing the most permanent radical principles and slogans of Marxism could be disseminated...Let this just be cement blocks with inscriptions on them as legible as possible. For the moment I'm not even thinking in terms of eternity or permanence...even more important than the inscriptions I consider monuments; busts or full-length figures, perhaps bas-reliefs, groups...We should compile a list of the predecessors of socialism and its theoreticians and fighters, as well as those luminaries of philosophical thought, science and so forth, which while not having direct relevance to socialism, were genuine heroes of culture..."³

These 'permanent' depictions of real life that Lenin describes, serve to glorify the functions and dictums of the state, attempting to engage the public in collective memory and national pride. Lenin in the 30's coined the term 'social realism' to describe what he saw as the most democratic and socialistic form of art. These monuments would inscribe the lessons of the Russian Revolution in every public square and street, to insure a 'radical permanency'. These scenes from real life were not at all scenes from daily life, and daily struggle, but the commemoration of the scene of the Russian Revolution, which would be permanently lodged in daily reality.

Formally these sculptural objects are representational, illustrative and pictorial. They describe or depict national events, causes and personages. They reinforce an established "culture" and elevate that culture above the individual. "Culture" is defined through the state, and an artistic compromise ensues. The public becomes a mass, a mass of people who are asked to identify and collectively act (conform). The sculptural monument, rather than containing daily reality and perception, serves to symbolize and embody an ideal. Not only sculpture, but culture is understood through an anti-dialectical process, a final and verified history; one which has little to do with the lived experience of a people. Change is denied through a bronzed replica of reality. The 'authentic' object is the object which is verified by the state.

There exists, however, several kinds of public arts. While we have been accustomed to one kind of sculptural monument, we are also familiar with a second type. These take the form of enlarged objects, figures or abstractions. Most artists in the last 50 years have contributed to a growing decoration of public streets with inert, often pleasing sculptures. We recognize them through their names (artistic personalities): a "Calder", a "Nevelson", a "Moore",

a "Smith" etc. The problem with these public works is largely their inception in the studio and transferral to a public location. They are portable objects, dislocated. Their connection to a public is superficial, neutralized by a foreign location, a lack of specificity or purpose. When you enter an artist's studio and observe the works, they are clearly defined by their location, connection to craft, etc. Public sculpture or monuments are commissioned by civic bodies, architectural or corporate firms to decorate their public facades, terraces, walkways... Little attention is paid to structure or context. The effort of this work is compromised, through the artist and through the client. These works serve to glorify and disseminate the artistic personality. The cult of a "Nevelson" or "Calder" or "Oldenburg" is championed above any individual or collective interest. Again the artwork, rather than engaging its public in collective memory and experience, looks inward, isolates itself, and celebrates the celebrity. "Each product is its advertisement."⁴

If the first type of sculptural monument encourages an ingenuine or fake collectivity, the second encourages a fake individuality. Both are self-serving. In one case, the monuments worship the star-heroes of the revolution, the war, the state

ideology, and in doing so reinforce a belief in collective action. The other promotes a competitive "star-system" for the celebrity-artist; it fosters a belief in the myth of the individual over society. Art then takes on the meaning of a game or sport whose participants have something to win or lose, determined by an outside cultural industry. This is another form of social control, where there are slight variations in an overall conformity.

Finally these public monuments are marked by their inability to perform as anything other than illustrative, decorative or allegorical statues of historical or personal events. Their scale is large, modelled to neighboring buildings or open space. Their materials, industrial and durable. Their forms blown up from small-scale models. They are recreations in the round, often on pedestals. A space is cleared in parks, terraces, courtyards or plazas. They fit in and occupy space. They are inert. Such spaces are always pruned and immaculate, usually emulating museum or gallery space. "They are finished landscapes for finished art."⁵ As such, they do not begin to touch the complexity involved in individual response to an environment.

" LIKE IT OR NOT, HISTORY IS THE FUNCTION OF ANY ONE OF US. IT IS IN THIS SENSE TODAY, THAT ONE HAS TO REGARD HISTORY NOT AT ALL AS 1) THE EVENTS OF THE PAST, 2) AS A "FATE" (MUSSOLINI CRYING, WHEN THE TROUPS HIT ANZIO "HISTORY HAS US BY THE THROAT" OR 3) THAT WE ARE MAKING IT, THAT HORRIBLE FALLACY OF THE PRESENT THAT SPEWS ITSELF OUT ALL RADIOS NEWSPAPERS MAGAZINES MOUTH, AS THOUGH IT WERE A DAMN FIRE SPITTING DRAGON.

IT IS LITERALLY A FUNCTION THAT ONE CAN TAKE QUIETLY AND USEFULLY."⁶

Beginning with the 1960's, a public art began to emerge which embraced the 'experiential', and understood history not as a written declaration of deeds and events, but rather as a function in the individual, through memory and experience. This work asks an open-ended question: how do we perceive, what are the formal, hence cultural properties of the materials we use, is it possible to perceive without preconceptions? Art was understood as being intrinsically political and therefore inseparable from its context. The art of the 60's and 70's rejected the emotionality and individualism of Abstract Expressionism, and sought instead to establish an art based on the experiential, the contextual, the dialectical. It was rational, idea-based and cut off from craft. It abandoned the museum and gallery as single context for exhibition, and instead located in urban, rural and industrial sites. Its materials were clearly not descriptive or decorative as earlier public sculpture; its content not allegorical or monumental.

Landscapes and parks ceased to function as backdrop or still-life for the sculptural object. Architecture, furniture and design became vehicles for artists to express ideas that could not be contained within the traditional catagories of painting and sculpture. A dialogue was attempted through the individual and his/her environment. Nothing was taken for granted. In other words, this public work redefined both the understanding of "public" and the understanding of "art".

If earlier monumental sculpture was marked by its uniformity of scale, subject matter and intent, recent public work is characterized by its diversity. If earlier public sculpture illustrated official events in order to make them real (to glorify state ideals); new public work intentionally politicizes its context, denies institutional symbology, and is directed towards the individual. It emphasizes the meaning of an environment through the experience of its participants. If a principle of monumental sculpture was its advertisement of a system, recent work denies that system.

Although the diversity of recent work might be characterized as chaotic, lacking cohesion and quality, such diversity actively challenges a centralized understanding and definition of culture. Work in

different mediums and contexts exists side by side, and is produced by many cultures. Rather than being disseminated solely through the gallery or museum, it is multiplied in print, performance, on streets. An official and standardized "culture" is replaced by a spontaneous one. In politicizing the context of art, this public work actively challenges an official culture, and redefines the aim of public work.

FOOTNOTES

1. Kevin Lynch, "The Image of the City", (M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, 1960), chapter 1, "The Image of the Environment".
2. Jack Burnham, "Beyond Modern Sculpture", (Braziller, New York, 1969), p. 1, quotation from Herbert Read.
3. Millon and Nochlin, "Art and Architecture in the Service of Politics, (M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, 1978), p. 185.
4. Theodore Adorno, "The Culture Industry", p. 8-11.
5. Robert Smithson, "Fredrick Law Olmstead and the Dialectical Landscape from the "Writings of Robert Smithson", (N.Y.U. Press, New York, 1979) pp. 117-127.
6. Charles Olson, "A Special View of History", (Oyez, Berkeley, 1970).

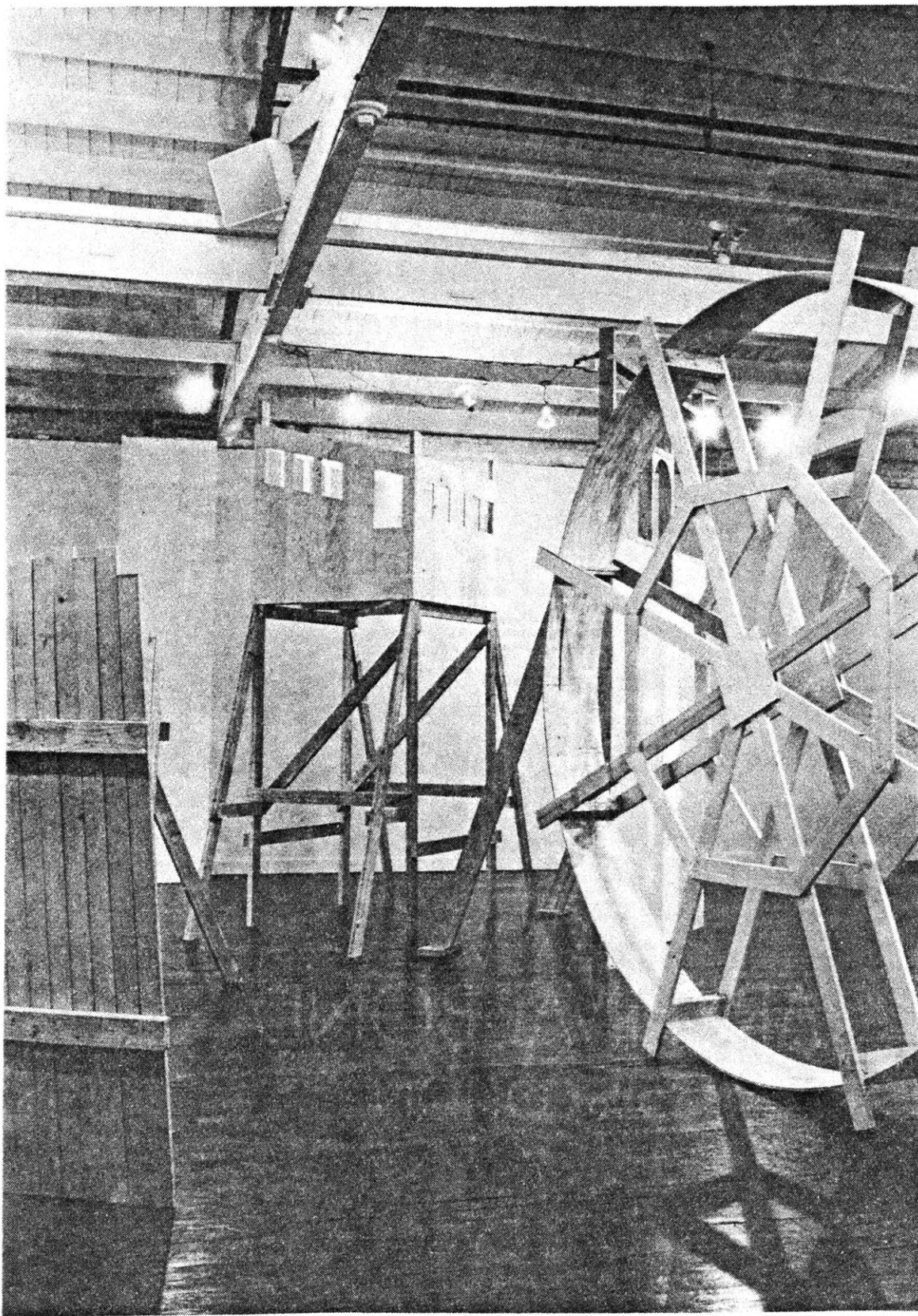
PART 2: STATEMENTS ON ARTISTS AND BY ARTISTS

The work of several artists in the 60's and 70's stands out because of its commitment towards a redefinition of sculpture through juxtaposing its formal concerns with those of the applied arts: architecture, furniture, theatre design etc. These artists gave up a strict formalist interpretation of their work, in exchange for forms which might draw out new understandings and better communication with their public. Sculpture in the round, seen in galleries and terraces was reviewed and discarded in favor of a more direct, social and spontaneous form and context: city streets, rural and industrial sites, temporary installations.

The work of Alice Aycock, Scott Burton, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson and Robert Irwin offers some insight into the diversity of sculptural concerns and context. Alice Aycock creates mythological structures, accompanied by verse or songs, in urban and rural locations. Scott Burton creates still-life performances with furniture, "bronzes" or casts in cold-rolled steel 'imitation' chairs, rustic camp-tables, desk-chair sets. Burton is specifically interested in the re-integration of the fine and the applied arts. He would like his work mass-produced, and reintegrated

into home use. Richard Serra builds large free-standing steel structures, which rust and stand graffitied on city streets. Smithson, interested in "entropy", seeks a non-idealistic view of nature and art. He chose abandoned or decaying sites for his work, and included the work's own degeneration as parts of its cycle. Robert Irwin creates work 'in response', and is interested in the 'experiential', rather than preconceived understandings of the art object.

Together, these artists represent a diversity of current sculptural concerns. They are actively challenging the public's and their own presumptions.



PROJECT ENTITLED "A precarious Method for Attacking an Enemy Fortress"
Derived in part from the Heron of Byzantium's Treatises
on war machines and geodesy and the Wright Brothers famous
London Gallows experiment, 1978

ALICE AYCOCK AS STORYTELLER

*"...so then, yours is truly a journey through memory! Perhaps all that is left of the world is a wasteland covered with rubbish heaps, and the hanging garden of the Great Khan's palace. It is our eyelids that separate them, but we cannot know which is inside and which outside... memories images, once fixed in words, are erased."*⁷

Kublai Khan's desire to comprehend the rational order of his kingdom (the universe) was a desire to possess that kingdom. In his conversations with Marco Polo he learns that all the cities are one, and that perhaps the empire was nothing but 'a zodiac of the mind's phantasms.'

Alice Aycock asks us to suspend our disbelief, and imagine that history is not rational, but rather a deeply emotional and irrational place, understood through a personal, subjective memory. Her sculpture is preoccupied with the unconscious, with coincidence, loss of order and organization; it is characterized by disorientation and contradiction. Medieval walled towns, roman amphitheatres, Egyptian shanty towns, rural American Architecture dominate Aycock's structures, where stairs and ladders lead nowhere, windows look inward, and entrances end at windows. The project called "Studies for a Town" implies a human presence but can only be occupied by memory and imagination (it cannot be entered). The project entitled "A Shanty Town which has Lunatic Charm That is Quite Engaging" or rather "A Shanty Town inhabited



PROJECT ENTITLED "On the Eve of the Industrial Revolution- A City engaged in the Production of False Miracles" featuring:

A Structure Called "An explanation for the Rainbow"
The Rabbit Story House
The Treadmill
A structure Called "The Ups and Downs" or "Hanging and Oscillating" and more
1978. Wood

-WHAT IS THE GENERATING STORY BEHIND THESE STRUCTURES?

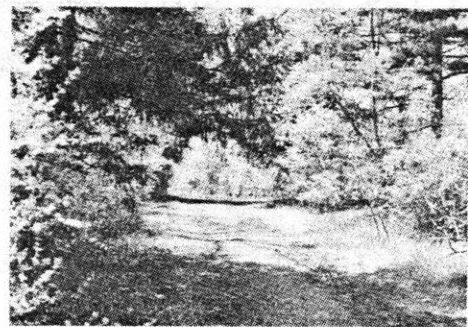
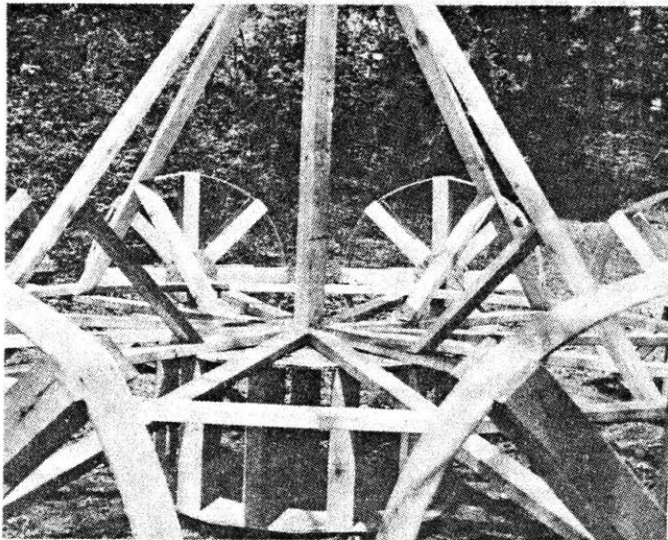
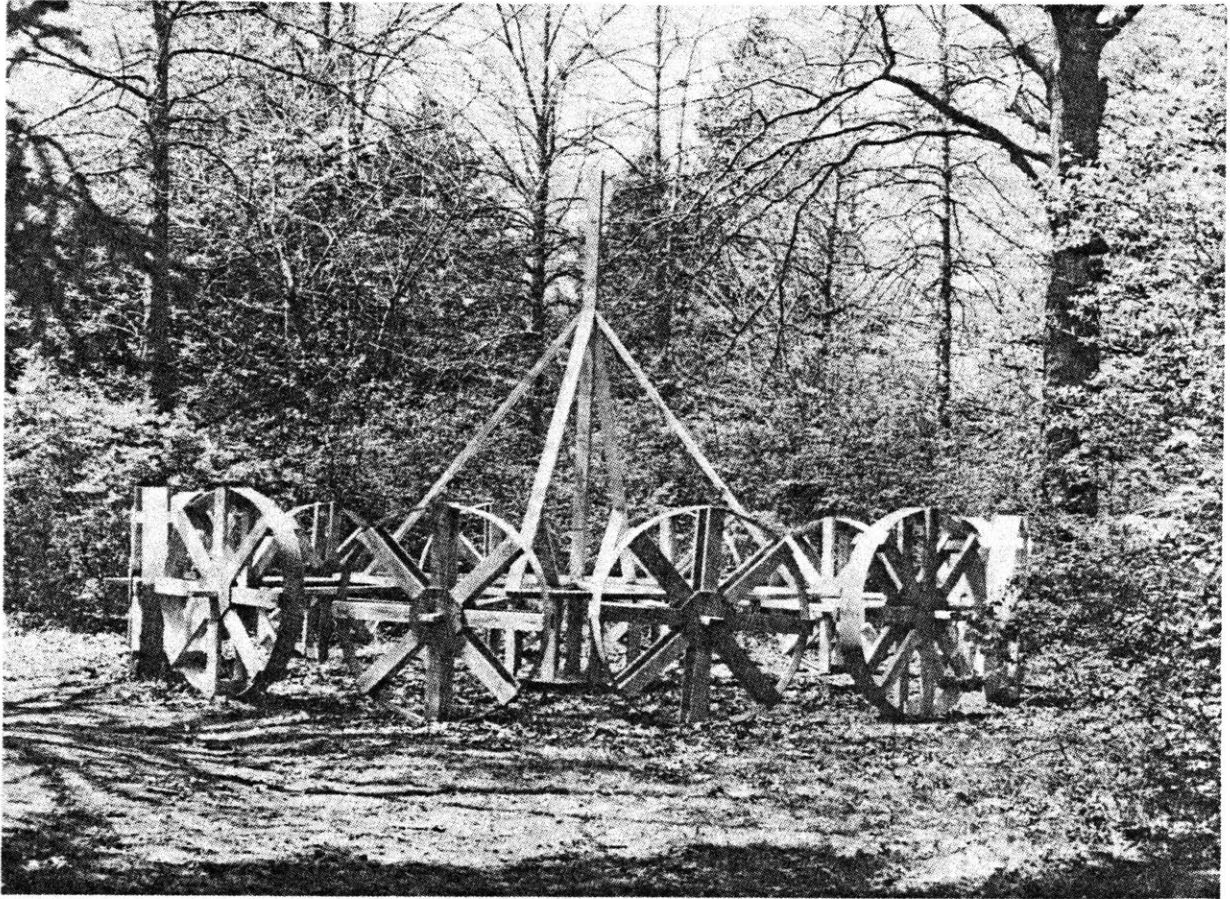
Executed for Cranbrook Academy of Art
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

Five structures were built in a wooded area across from the Jonah Pool at the end of Academy Way. These structures were located in terms of the existing system of "labyrinthian" paths which have been worn by people walking through the woods. The structures were designed as a complex.



by Two Lunatics Whose Charms are Quite Engaging" includes doors which are false or locked, streets which simply end, paths which appear worn by people walking. Underground, the 'shanties' are connected by rows of tunnels, many of which are dead-end. Aycock's work, which is full of this kind of historical or allegorical allusion understands the world not through a logical/rational order where time is linear, but through a world made by a personal order, where time is elastic and curved, without beginning or end. She insists on the oral history or folk legend rather than 'written history'.

THE PLAN OF THE CITY. *The city has been generated by five people who loved one another. They wore the paths, that is the outline of the walls as they moved each in turn from one to the other. When they realized what they had done, they tried in turn to draw the pattern that they had made, that is, to construct a city in which the "measurements of space" developed out of the "events of the past". And so there were five separate plans, each superimposed on the other. In some places one plan obliterated the other, in many places the plan changes while the city was under construction. For instance, the day after he finished his plan, Ulysse gave Michel-Ange a rub-down in the men's room in a suburb of La Paz.*



PROJECT ENTITLED: "The Angels Continue Turning the Wheels of the Universe Despite Their Ugly Souls: Part 1"

THE ACTION. *Most of the action is a secret. However, they did squabble about who did what, where and when. There were erasures of each other's drawings, and some old grievances were relived, like the time Venus was abandoned by Ulysse at a dance party in Bloomfield, Indiana, or the time Venus begged Cleopatre to come to Sarajevo and when Cleopatre finally arrived having paid an excess baggage charge...But never mind about that. Basically the walls are red herrings.*

THE THEME SONG. Don't know much about the Middle Ages
Look at pictures and I turn the pages
Don't know much about no Rise and Fall
Don't know nothing about nothing at all
But I do know if you loved me
What a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful
world this would be.⁸

Aycock's anecdotes, titles and descriptive texts again reinforce the idea that rationality is synonymous with a desire for possession (memories images once fixed in words are erased) and that history is irrational. The "City of Walls" was engineered by love, inscribed by the memory of that love partially obscured and erased), each plan superimposed on the other. As is characteristic with oral discourse, the past is constantly relived in the present: Rome in Baha, California, Venus in Bloomfield, Indiana, Cleopatra with Dick Tracy. The walls of this city are "red herrings".



PROJECT ENTITLED "The Beginnings of a Complex...":
For Documenta

1977. Wood and concrete

Executed for "Documenta", Kassel, Germany

Wall Facade: 40' long; 8', 12', 16', 20', 24', high
respectively

Square Tower: 24' high x 8' square

Tall Tower Group: 32' high

Listening to these stories demands a 'willing suspension of disbelief within the parameters the narrator provides.'⁹ This narrator is female, and her work is directly and emphatically about that female perception. Aycock defies what she sees as the fallacies of western rational order, and replaces it with an oral, folk-lore tradition. Aycock stands out among the many sculptors using architecture as a subject/method, in her insistence on irrationality, contradiction and emotion. An epic is an oral inscription of geneology, spoken or sung by the individual, achieving a social memory through the individual.¹⁰ Aycock's work functions as a kind of epic.

" On the day that I know all the emblems", Kublai asked Marco, "shall I be able to possess my empire at last?" And the Venetian answered: "Sire, I do not believe it. On that day you will become an emblem among emblems."¹¹



Chair, Bronze Replica Series, 1975

SCOTT BURTON

Donald Judd coined the term "specific objects" (1965) to describe a new kind of work which was neither painting or sculpture; work which was not descriptive, compositional or anthropomorphic, but rather a single and explicit image in which all the parts and the whole are co-extensive. Judd was speaking of a developing work which contained ideas and content impossible to fit into the categories of painting and sculpture. Burton calls his own work "independent specific objects."

Scott Burton, an artist emerging in the 60's from performance art, has developed a syntax, using precisely crafted chairs, tables and ensembles, often reproduced from vernacular, mass-produced styles. Burton takes on the role of "impersonator of design",¹² to transform the reductivist tendencies of minimalist art, into a socially reflective one. His work is populist in intent, but definitely not 'homemade'. His surfaces and craftsmanship are immaculate, his images clean and entire. He isolates our household/family objects and gives them all the specificity and identity of their owners. They are furniture, but do not blend into a setting. Like a person, they create their own space. They dislodge our familiar and repetitive understanding of furniture with an unfamiliarity which furnishes our memory and experience with contradictory signals. We are forced again to 'experience' a chair or table.



RUSTIC TABLE, Bronze Replica
Series, 1978
Cast Bronze

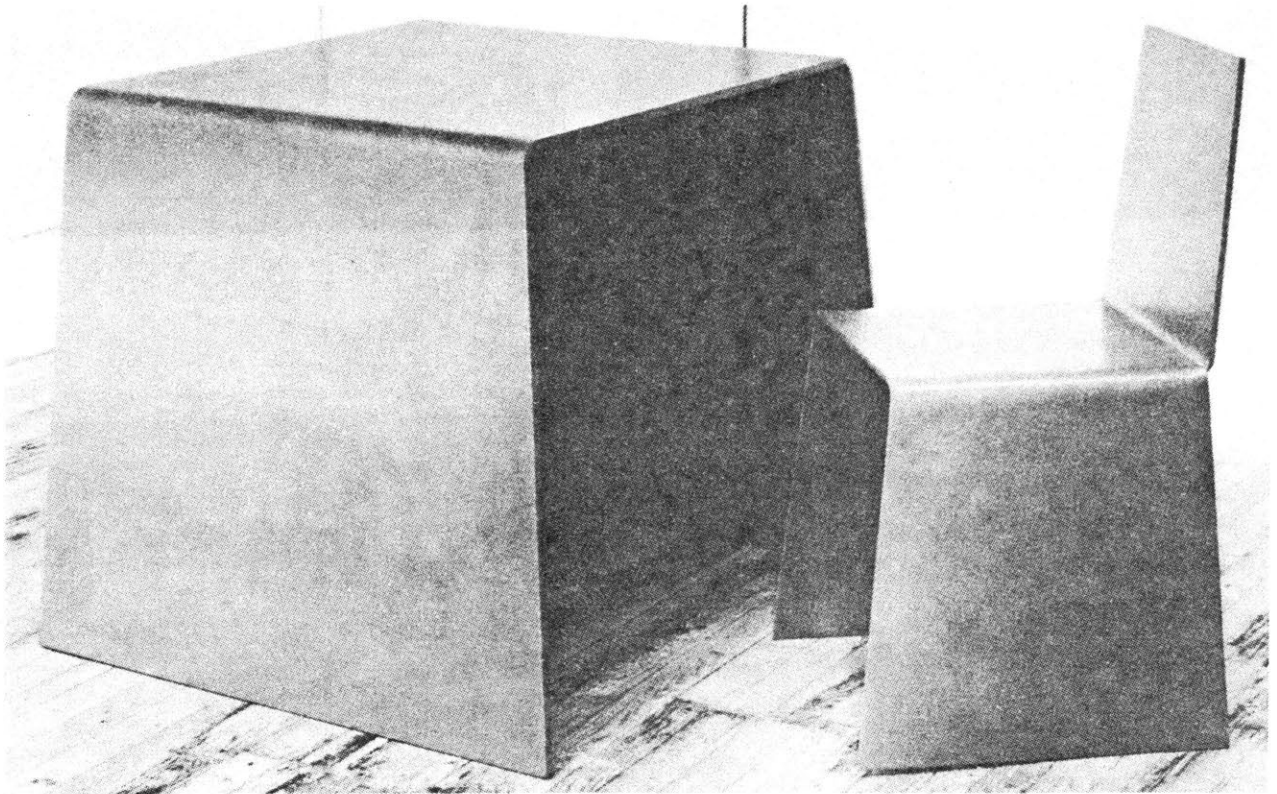
Burton's performance pieces of the 60's and 70's (eg. Iowa Furniture Landscape) include tables, chairs and sofas in forest clearings the size of rooms and recorded in photographs. They bring to mind the American act of clearing the forest, of clearing nature in order to make room for the comfortable house or dwelling. As a culture, the act of tearing down and taming the wilderness is integrally tied to our identity and concept of freedom. This is a central metaphor of Burton's work.

The bronzing of the cheapest kind of fake Queen Ann mass-produced chair, or the bronzing of a rustic camp-table is an authentication/ enunciation of what those objects embody or represent. The desk and chair sets which are reproduced and cast in cold-rolled steel, also begin to immortalize a simple, human activity. In both his furniture objects and performance, Burton's works reveal in their veneers, structures and positioning the peculiar psychology of our everyday and familiar world. A desk, chair or sofa all speak of both a cultural and personal psychology. He points out that the arrangement and rearrangement of these objects is not a casual circumstance but dictated by specific needs and desires. Burton is not interested in a 'crafted' or 'folk' design, but rather imitates "style" in order to

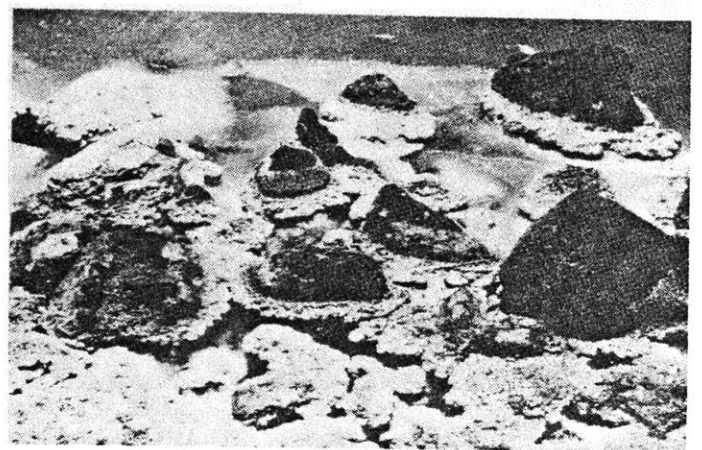
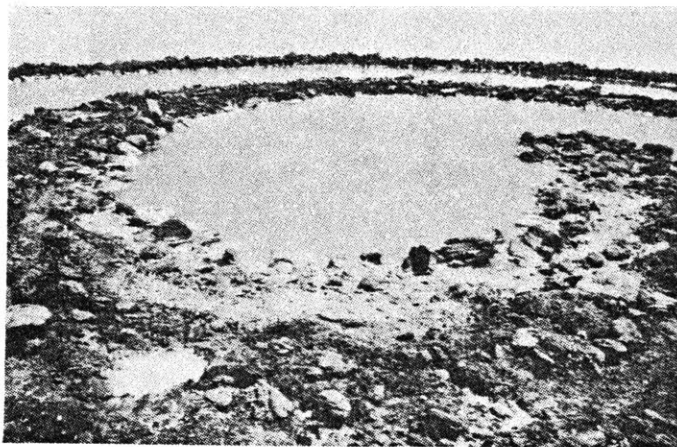
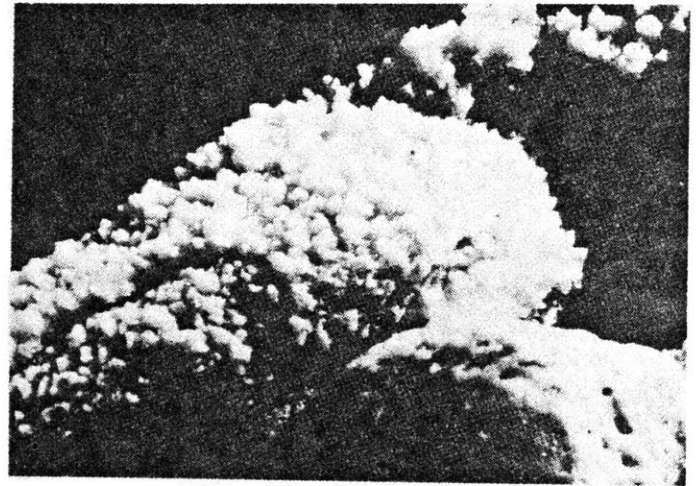
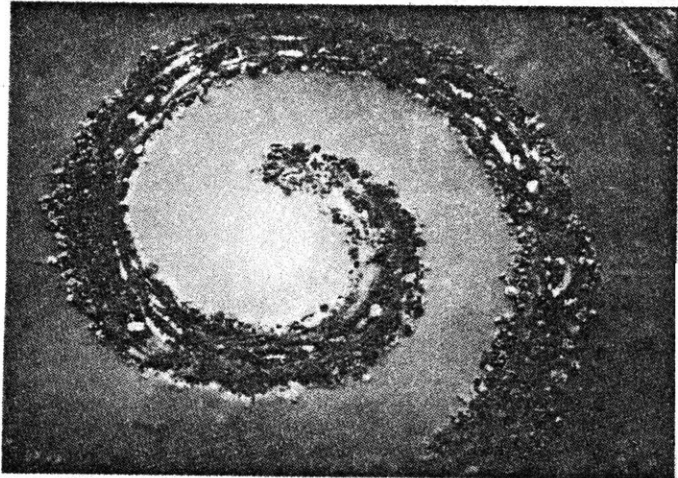
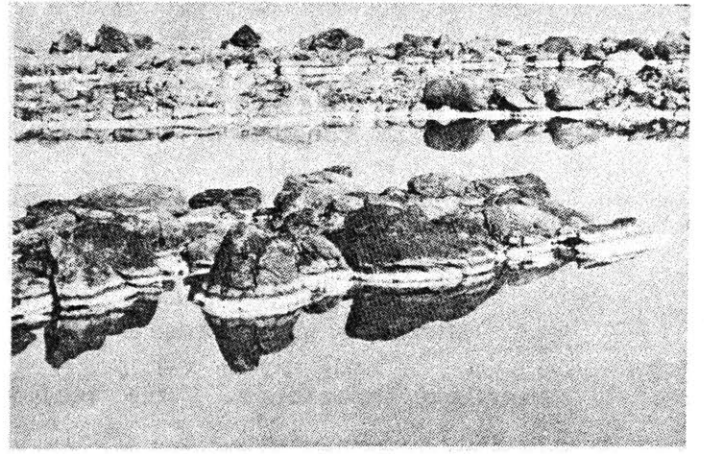
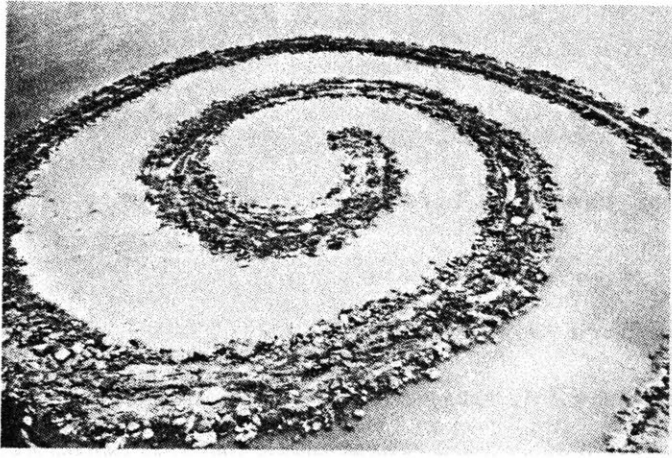
crystallize the image, the materiality and psychology of the object. His is an aesthetic of everyday life.

Burton's work reveals many metaphors concerning American experience. His vehicle is the clarity of richness of the image:

*" The image is the product of both immediate sensation and the memory of past experience, and is used to interpret information and guide action...and as an organizer of belief, or activity or knowledge."*¹³



Chair, 1979 (four of six chairs from one set in an edition of three sets)

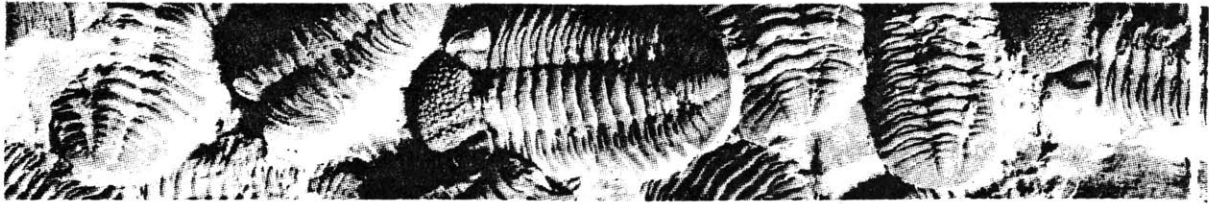


THE SPIRAL JETTY, 1970

ROBERT SMITHSON

"One's mind and earth are in a constant state of erosion, mental rivers wear away abstract banks, brain waves undermine cliffs of thought, ideas decompose into stones of unknowing, and conceptual crystallizations break apart into deposits of gritty reason. Vast moving faculties occur in this geological miasma, and they move in the most physical way."

In Smithson's statement, geology parallels consciousness, and man is part of a vast continuum of nature, which erodes and changes in time. Smithson's fascination with anthropomorphism and entropy, as well as what he terms the 'dialectic' of nature led him to a radically American position as an artist of the 60's and 70's. Smithson rejected studio involvement, and the connection to craft which accompanies it. He questioned the portable object, which, removed from its place of inception, loses its meaning, its 'charge', becoming disengaged from the outside world. This detachment in space and time creates a frozen object which has little to do with lived experience. His belief in 'experience' and the temporality of art directed him to work on-site, often with locations which were physically marred by time: dead seas, sand quarries, sites disrupted by industry, urbanization and natural disaster. The RECLAMATION of unusable land for art, was an effort to create a landscape of meaning, as Fredrick Law Olmstead's reclamation of land for Central Park:



PERMIAN THE PROVINCE OF PERM IN RUSSIA. EVAPORATION CAUSES LAND TO SHRINK. CONTINENTAL DRIFT. A DRAWING OF THE SKULL OF THE REPTILE ELGINIA (RELATED TO PAREIASAURUS, FROM PERMIAN SANDSTONE IN ELGIN, N.E. SCOTLAND, DRAWN TO ONE-QUARTER NATURAL SIZE). THROUGH THE EYES OF DIMETRODON. PERMIAN ICE AGE. THUS, THE PULSATING MOVEMENT OF GLACIERS IS DUE TO THE PROPERTIES OF ICE ITSELF AND IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE PERIODIC ACCUMULATION AND REMOVAL OF ELASTIC STRESS IN POLYCRYSTALLINE AGGREGATE (P.A. SHUMSKI). HOT DESERT CONDITIONS. NOTES REGARDING FORAMINIFERA. REMAINS OF SLOW WADDLING CREATURES FOUND IN RUSSIA AND SOUTH AFRICA. SEAS WERE CUT-OFF FROM THE OCEAN, UNTIL THEY BECAME INCREASINGLY SALINE. DRASTIC CHANGES OF THE LANDSCAPE TAKE PLACE. A VOLCANO ACCORDING TO HUTTON IS A SPIRACLE TO A SUBTERRANEAN FURNACE. FANTASTIC IDEAS WERE LATER CAST ASIDE BY THE PLUTONISTS. SOLIDIFIES IN GRANITE. FAUST SAYS, SET ROCK TO ROCK... THE NEPTUNIAN THEORY. THE SYMMETRY OF THE EARTH WAS THOUGHT TO BE SPOILED. MODERN ORDERS OF INSECTS EMERGE. A SPIRALLY COILED BAND OF TEETH BELONGED TO HELICOPRION. DWARF FAUNA. ONE SENTENCE DEVOTED TO INSECTS IN A CHAPTER ON THE PERMIAN PERIOD. STEREOSCOPIC VIEWS OF THE GUADALOUPE SEA. NUANCES OF CHANGING LIGHT OVER RECONSTRUCTIONS OF DECIDUOUS TREES. SNAPSHOTS OF POISON GAS. DIORAMA OF ASH HEAPS. DAGUERRETYPE SHOWING VAST DEPOSITS OF SALT AND GYPSUM. EQUATOR IN OKLAHOMA. SPOILED PHOTOGRAPHS OF SAND DUNES. PHOTOMICROGRAPHIC STUDIES OF FOSSIL FROST. AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS OF GLACIATION. STRATIGRAPHIC MAP OF OIL DEPOSITS. MISPLACED BOUNDARIES. SHIFTS IN POLAR AXIS RECORDED. EVAPORATION OF SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE. MARATHON MOUNTAIN SKETCHED. JOURNALS DEVOTED TO RADIATION DAMAGE. UNDEVELOPED FILM OF DRY LAND MASS. NEGATIVES OF SHELLY ORGANISMS. A BOOK ON EDAPHOSAURUS. COLOR SLIDES OF PERMIAN PRAIRIES.



CARBONIFEROUS THE COAL PERIOD. GEOGRAPHY OF THE LOWER CARBONIFEROUS PERIOD SHOWN ON AN OVAL MAP, WITH BLACK DOTS SYMBOLIZING LAND PLANTS. SLUG-LIKE CREATURES GLIDE OVER DEAD CALAMITES. TERRIGENOUS CLASTIC SEDIMENTS EXTENDED TO A LINE PASSING WEST OF MICHIGAN. EARTH WARPAGE. PHOTOGRAPH OF LIMESTONES NEAR BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA. NATURE IS NOT THE STARTING POINT. ALL ROUND THE COAST THE LANGUID AIR DID SWOON... (TENNYSON). PURELY STATIC SHAPES. CLUMPS GLIMPSED THROUGH THE EYES OF ERYOPS. THE BRITISH MUSEUM BUILT 1824. THE GLYPTOTHEK IN MUNICH 1816-1834. AS DECAY AND DEATH OVERTOOK THESE FOREST GIANTS THEY EVENTUALLY CRASHED INTO THE MUD AND OOZE SURROUNDING THEM (CHARLES R. KNIGHT). THE IMMUTABLE CALM IN THE STEAMING SWAMPS. THINGS FAIL TO APPEAR. WORDS SINKING INTO THE MUCK AND MIRE. COLLECTING THE FOSSIL AND SENDING IT TO THE MUSEUM IS ONLY PART OF THE STORY (EDWIN H. COLBERT). A CAMERA OBSCURA REPRODUCES A PALEO-GEOLOGIC MAP. THE SPLITTING OF MARINE BEDS. ERODED OUT. DIAGRAM SHOWING EUSTATIC MOVEMENT—RISE AND FALL OF SEA LEVEL OF 100 FEET IN 400,000 YEARS. EPIROGENIC SINKING. IT IS IN THE MUSEUM-URGE THAT OUR LEARNING SHOWS A FACE TURNED TOWARDS THE THINGS OF DEATH (ERNST JUNGNER). A HEAP BETWEEN FORGETFULNESS AND MEMORY. A RECONSTRUCTION OF AN EARLY CARBONIFEROUS (MISSISSIPPIAN) SEA AS IN NORTHWESTERN INDIANA, (THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION). IN THESE NATURAL TRAPS THEY DIED, AND WERE EVENTUALLY BURIED. (MARSHALL LAY AND EDWIN H. COLBERT). ATTUNING OF GEOLOGIC TIME. SLEEPING MARATHONERS DREAM NOTHING. A TECTONIC MAP OF THE CANADIAN APPALACHIAN REGION. UNSTABLE CONTINENTS. SEDIMENTS ON THE EAST SHORE OF THE BAY OF FUNDY AT JOGGINS, NOVA SCOTIA. SOUNDLESS WINDS. ARTIFICIAL LIGHT. AQUATINT ENGRAVINGS OF FOSSILS.



DEVONIAN HUGE QUANTITIES OF PEBBLES, SAND AND MUD. DEVONSHIRE... APPARENTLY THE WRECK OF SOME GIGANTIC STRUCTURES OF ART... (POE). THE WORLD THROUGH THE EYES OF A DEVONIAN LUNG FISH. POLISHED PIECES OF SILICA ROCK. FUNGAL THREADS AND RESTING SPORES. SUNSHINE ON THE PETRIFIED DEPOSITS. A LAKE LOST UNDER THE DEBRIS. SPIRAL SHELLS. FOSSIL FOREST EXHIBITED IN A DIORAMA IN THE NEW YORK STATE MUSEUM. EOSPERMATOPHYTES IS PROMINENT. MOSS. ANTERIOR MEMORIES. LAYER UPON LAYER. UNLESS THE INFORMATION GAINED FROM THE COLLECTING AND PREPARING OF FOSSILS IS MADE AVAILABLE THROUGH THE PRINTED PAGE, ASSEMBLAGE SPECIMENS IS ESSENTIALLY A PILE OF MEANINGLESS JUNK (EDWIN H. COLBERT). A DOUBT WHICH TURNS TO NEGATION, BUT FEIGNED NEGATION. DENDROIDS AND GRAPTOLITES DISAPPEAR. MORE LIME ACCUMULATES. A MODEL SHOWING HOW A VOLCANO ERUPTS. TREE FERNS DECAY INTO FLORA CEMETERIES. RECONSTRUCTION OF LATE DEVONIAN SEA BOTTOM IN WESTERN NEW YORK. DIORAMA (CHICAGO NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM). A FAINT ILLUSIONISTIC BACKDROP EXTENDS A FALSE UNDERSEA LANDSCAPE. JAWLESS FISHES IN GRAY WATER. A GAZE EQUAL TO SPACE. THE BURDEN OF MILLIONS OF YEARS. ONLY THE GREAT HORIZONS OF THE ABSENT WORLD REFLECT IN THE MIND. THE POTHOLES OF A WEAK IMAGINATION. MIRAGES ON THE VOLCANIC PLAINS. FOSSILIFEROUS ROCKS CRUMBLE IN MAINE. QUARTZ IN THE BRAIN. ACADIAN DISTURBANCE. THE AGE OF FISH. THE AGE OF SNAILS. THE AGE OF CALMS. MILLIONS OF YEARS PAST. A FAMOUS FOSSIL DELTA IN THE CATSKILLS. SPIDERS AND WINGLESS INSECTS ALSO ARRIVED. UPLIFT IN THE MIDST OF THE MOST COMPLETE BLINDNESS. AN UNKEMPT CEMETERY OF ANNULARIA. THE DEVONIAN PERIOD IS A SUCCESSION OF LOSSES. AT OUTSKIRTS OF MUD. SPASMODIC CHRONOLOGY. SUBSTRATA. EXHIBITION OF PLACODERMS.



SILURIAN SEAWEEDS WITH LIMY SKELETONS. SUBMARINE TROUGHS DEEPEN. STONE-LILIES. BRIGHT COLORED POLYPS SPREAD. NEW MOUNTAIN RANGES APPEAR. THEIR NAMES ARE IMMATERIAL—DULL DESCRIPTIONS IN A BOOK. THESE SILURIAN TERRAINS EXIST BY CONCEALMENT. NOTHING BUT BLAND REFERENCES TO A VAGUE SET OF GEOLOGIC FORMATIONS. THE EARTH DIPS OUT OF SIGHT. ALL THE ACTIVITY IS LOST UNDER THE LIMPID OCEANS. ALL IS SEDIMENTATION AND AIMLESS EFFORT. THE SILURIAN NIGHT CASTS THE NINE FOOT SEA SCORPIONS INTO TOTAL DARKNESS, WHERE THEY LIVED MAINLY IN ESTUARIES AND COASTAL LAGOONS. SILENCE. DARKNESS. AND DISMAL PERFECTION. I CANNOT DISCOVER THIS OCEANIC FEELING IN MYSELF (FREUD). MASSIVE HEAPS OF SKELETONS CAPABLE OF WITHSTANDING BUFFETING IN ROUGH WATER. CORAL BREAKDOWN. FLOATING GRAPTOLITES. MANY SANK TO THE BOTTOM. SHALE. 400 MILLION YEARS AGO. PERIODIC ALTERNATION OF THE LEVEL OF LAND AND SEA. LESS VOLCANIC ACTIVITY THAN IN ORDOVICIAN TIMES. UNDERSEA MOUNTAINS. RAVINES AND VALLEYS. CRUSTAL MOVEMENT. TRAVERTINE. SWAMP TREASURE. DRAWINGS OF SINKHOLES AND CRATERS. THINKING OF THE TUNDRA NEAR HUDSON BAY. THE MID-CONTINENT IS A RELIEF OF FEATURELESS FEATURES. OVER THE SCAFFOLDING OF THE MARATHON TROUGH. SODIUM CHLORIDE IN THE EYES. ONLY TWO DIMENSIONS EXIST. HOURS AND DAYS ON LLANORIA. YESTERDAYS ARE DEFORMED. MONOCHROME MAPS. NO RECORD OF LIFE ON THE LAND. FUTURE TIME UNDER SALTY SEAS. RECREATING CRINOID. HAZE. PERIODS OF ABANDONMENT. THE LIMITS OF THE MICHIGAN BASIN. A VAST AND HIDEOUS CONTINENT

STRATA A GEOPHOTOGRAPHIC FICTION

Robert Smithson

"Olmstead's parks exist before they are finished, which means in fact they are never finished; they remain carriers of the unexpected and of contradiction on all levels of human activity, be it social, political or natural."¹⁵

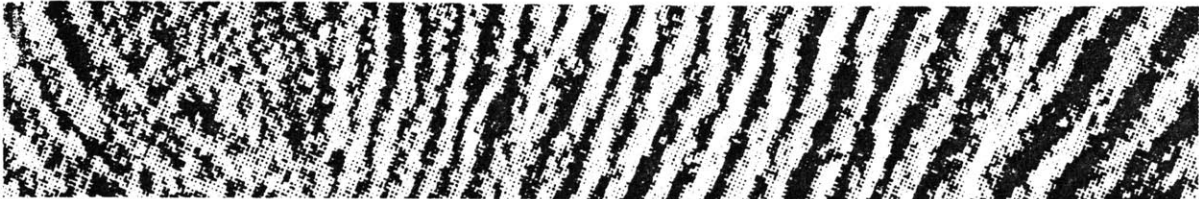
In this way an equilibrium in nature is formed through a dialectic of disintegration and regrowth (entropy). The objectification of nature is uninformed by the terror, solitude and destruction which accompanies growth. Smithsonian's interest in decaying sites was to find a site free of scenic meanings relating to isolated and idealistic notions of the 'beautiful' and the 'sublime'.

"I am for an art which takes into account the direct effect of the elements as they exist from day to day apart from representation. Objects in a park suggest static repose rather than any ongoing dialectic. Parks are finished landscapes for finished art. A park carries the values of the final, the absolute, the sacred. Dialectics has nothing to do with such things....Parks are idealizations of nature, but nature in fact is not a condition of the ideal. Nature does not proceed in a straight line, it is rather a sprawling development. Nature is never finished. When a finished work of 20th century sculpture is placed in an 18th century garden, it is absorbed by the ideal representation of the past thus reinforcing political and social values that are no longer with us. Many parks and gardens are recreations of the lost paradise of Eden, and not the dialectical sites of the present. Parks and gardens are pictorial in their origin-landscapes created with natural materials rather than paint. The scenic ideals that surround even our national parks are carriers of nostalgia for heavenly bliss and eternal calmness."¹⁶

Many of Smithsonian's earth projects include negotiations with strip mining companies, architects, engineers and consultants. His sites included lakes,



ARENIG AND SKIDDAW SLATES. SPONGES WITH A FRAMEWORK OF SILICA. THROVE AT VARIOUS DEPTHS. VOLCANOES ERUPTED UNDER THE OCEAN. PAINTING SHOWING AN
 PROOVIKIAN SOUTH DAKOTA. THE MUD GROVELLING: AMPYX. FORGOTTEN PILES OF SANDSTONE. OCEAN FLOOR COLLAPSES. ROTTEN VEGETATION DECOMPOSES INTO ROTTEN
 ROCK. MAGNESIA. NO LONGER A FAITHFUL IMITATION OF ETERNITY, BUT A CONSTANT STATE OF EROSION. THREE STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A THRUST FAULT, SHOWN
 IN A LINE DRAWING. DISLOCATED BY A MOLTEN CONDITION. THE BURIAL OF THE BRYOZOA. *FOR WHERE THINGS ARE DISCERNED AT INTERVALS OF TIME, THERE ARE FALSE-
 FOODS; AND WHERE THINGS HAVE AN ORIGIN IN TIME, THERE ERRORS ARISE* (ASCLEPIUS). DECREPITUDE AND DELIQUESCENCE. BOTCHED FABRICATIONS ON THE FOGGY
 LANDSCAPE. PLANKTONIC CALCAREOUS ORGANISMS FALLING. CAREFULLY LABELED SPECIMENS ARE FILED AWAY. A TEDIOUS PART OF FOSSIL COLLECTING TAKES PLACE
 UNDER THE HOT SUN IN THE BAD LANDS. QUICKSAND. DIAGRAM WITH ORANGE BACKGROUND SHOWS HOW ROCK RESISTANCE INFLUENCES TOPOGRAPHY. A SORT OF JIGSAW
 PUZZLE FOR GEOLOGISTS. X-RAY VIEW OF AN OIL WELL. A LIGHT BLUE AND TAN MAP SHOWS OROGENIC LAND SHAPES. OVERTURNED ANTICLINE IS A TYPE OF STRATA END
 WANDERING WATERS. GEOLOGY EXEMPLIFIES A NEW IDEA IN PAPERBACK PUBLISHING—A SERIES OF OUTSTANDING BOOKS, ILLUSTRATED THROUGHOUT IN FULL COLOR. LAKE
 DONNEVILLE HAS SHRUNK. VAST STRETCHES OF SALT FLATS. EVAPORATION. OLD FAITHFUL—YELLOWSTONE'S FAVORITE GEYSER. LOCCOLITHS. PROFILE OF A SHIELD VOLCANO:
 HAWAII'S MAUNA LOA. PTOLEMY GUESSED THAT THE EARTH IS A BALL. OUACHITA. BLUE INK ON TEXAS. CANADIAN SHIELD SINKS. THE OZARK DOME PAINTED ON A MAP AS A
 FLUR. IMPRESSIONISTIC DRAWINGS OF THE ARCTIC.



GONDWANALAND? REEFS FORMED CORALLINE SPONGES (ARCHAEOCYATHINES). THE GREAT THICKNESS OF BLACK MUD. THE ROMAN NAME FOR WALES. BOTTOM LIVING FORMS
 WERE BLIND. PAXADOXIDES SHOWN IN A LINE-CUT ARE SAID TO BE HALF NATURAL SIZE. MUNDUS SUBTERRANEUS. PUTTING FACTS TOGETHER LIKE A JIGSAW PUZZLE. LANGUAGE
 AND SOIL BLOW AWAY. FLOODS. BILATERALLY SYMMETRICAL CREATURES. AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE AUSTRAL SEA (BLUE ON GRAY DOTS). A FRAGMENTARY THEORY. EXCAVA-
 TIONS AT DINOSAUR NATIONAL MONUMENT IN NORTHEASTERN UTAH. PALAEOZOIC ERA SHOWN ON AN OLD CHART. LITTLE IS KNOWN ABOUT THE LAND AREAS. THEY PLOUGHED
 THEIR WAY THROUGH THE MUD. WORMS AND MORE WORMS TURN INTO GAS. SEA BUTTERFLIES FALL INTO A NAMELESS OCEAN. PLASTER RESTORATIONS COLLECTING DUST IN
 THE MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY. THE TRACKS OF TRILOBITES HARDEN INTO FOSSILS. ACCUMULATIONS OF WASTE ON THE SEA BOTTOMS. JELLY-FISH BAKING UNDER THE SUN.
 DIGESTIVE SYSTEMS SHOWN IN DIAGRAMS. ...A TENDENCY TO AMORPHOUSNESS... (HEINRICH WOLFFLIN). ...SCABBY TOPOGRAPHY ON SOLFATARA PLATEAU (C. MAX BAUER). MAY
 HAVE LOOKED LIKE THE PLANET VENUS. LIMP-LOOKING CRUSTACEANS. DYING BY THE MILLIONS. *WILL YOU FOLLOW ME AS FAR AS THE SARGASSO SEA?* (GIORGIO DE CHIRICO).
 CONGLOMERATE THOUGHTS. MOLLUSCA. BREAKING APART INTO PARTICLES. SOMETHING FLOWING BETWEEN THE CARIBBEAN AND NEWFOUNDLAND. THE EQUATOR OVER NEW
 MEXICO MADE OF DOTS AND DASHES. (PORIFERA). BELTS OF SCATTERED ISLANDS. LLANORIA SOUTH OF LOUISIANA. MOUNTAINS OF JELLY FISH. THE DIMENSIONS OF AN
 UNKNOWN SLIME. LIME SECRETING COLLEENIA. A GLOBE SHOWING THE APPALACHIAN TROUGH. GALLERIES FULL OF ODD NAMES AND MODELS. CLOUDS MADE OF PAPER. A DRAW-
 ING OF CASCADIA DRAWN PARALLEL TO THE PACIFIC COAST. A GUIDE TO GRIT.



MEMORY AT THE CHTHONIC LEVEL. FLOATING ON SOFT MUDS NEAR THE BLIND RIVER. PINK FOSSILS. OBSCURE TRACES OF LIFE. HALF TONE PICTURES OF STRATIFIED ROCKS.
 RECONSTRUCTIONS OF SANDSTONES IN SQUARE GLASS CASES. HOT WATER. RIDDLE OF THE SEDIMENTS. LOST IN THE ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA. BEACHED. BOILING, BUBBLING
 OCEANS. PHOTOGRAPH OF BANDED RED CHERT OR JASPER IN THE SOUTHERN MINNESOTA (MINNESOTA GEOLOGICAL SURVEY). A GRAFT SHOWING THE CORRELATION OF THE
 SUCCESSIONS OF ROCK UNITS IN SEVERAL DISTRICTS. *IGNEOUS* MEANING FIRE. *WE LIVE AMID THE WRECK OF FORMER WORLDS* (JEROME WYCHOFF. *OUR CHANGING EARTH*
 THROUGH THE AGES—FULLY ILLUSTRATED WITH PHOTOGRAPHS AND PAINTINGS). THIS PERIOD IS LOSING ITSELF IN SAND AND PAGES. THE REGION BEGINS TO DISSIPATE. AN
 AERIAL PHOTO SHOWING THE DRIFT OF LAVA. SOME THOUGHTS ARE SINKING INTO THE CONGLOMERATE. LOGAN PASS IN GLACIER NATIONAL PARK IS MADE OF CRUSTAL BLOCKS.
 THE AGE OF POTASSIUM-ARGON. GEOLOGICAL GHOSTS ON THE PAGES OF A BOOK ON VIRUSES. ANIMALS WITHOUT BACKBONES TURN INTO STONE. *IF ONLY THE GEOLOGISTS*
 COULD LET ME ALONE, I COULD DO VERY WELL, BUT THOSE DREADFUL HAMMERS (JOHN RUSKIN). GRAPHITE (A CRYSTALLINE TYPE OF CARBON). SLIMY DAYS. STEAMING
 GEYSER BASINS (NOBODY'S YELLOWSTONE). COUNTERFEIT ALGAE IN THE MUSEUM. BURROWS IN A MOUNTAIN OF CORRUPTION. ...*THE QUEER FLOATING BASKET-LIKE VARIETY...*
 CHARLES R. KNIGHT). HEAPS OF CARBONATE LIME. POURING TONS OF MINERAL MATTER INTO A LAKE. IMITATION GRANITE. LAYERS OF OUT-DATED MAPS. XENUSION. PETRIFIED
 LUM ON DISPLAY. MAP OF THE MISSING SEA. EXTINCT SPONGE-LIKE THINGS. STEAM. CHARTS SHOWING CLAY FORMATIONS. THE PILING UP OF DEBRIS. ...*FUTILE AND STUPID*
 STAGNATION... (HENRY ADAMS). STALE TIME. ONE-CELLED NOTHING. ABSENCE OF OXYGEN.

oceans, quarries, deserts and airports. Smithson bought stock in several of the organizations that he was involved with. His involvement extended beyond his 'products' towards an intended connection with society. He condemned the view of art which encouraged isolation, neutrality and separation from the world; an art on an eternal plane, the withdrawal of the artist into "spiritualism, esoterism and mystification". Smithson was critical of the scope of art, and the institutions which supported it:

*"Museums, like jails and asylums, have wards and cells, in other words, neutral rooms called galleries ...critics by focusing on the 'art object' deprive the artist of any existence in the world of both mind and matter. The mental process of the artist that takes place in time is disowned, so that a commodity value can be maintained by a system independent of the artist."*¹⁷

Smithson regarded the 'object' as a denial of actual experience and a dialectic (which occurs in time). Art's value is then reduced to that of a commodity, whose significance is manipulated by the advertiser, not producer. Art therefore limits itself by allowing the gallery to classify, embellish and select; both the studio and the gallery are specific architectural situations which have little to do with experience in the real world. Smithson sought an art which would be understood outside of any art context, one which would bring us to our primordial beginnings.

QUASI INFINITIES AND THE WANING OF SPACE

raohs, but in this case the anthropomorphic measure is absent. Nothing is incarnated into nothing. Human decay is nowhere in evidence.

The isolated systems Samaras⁽²⁶⁾ has devised irradiate a malignant splendor. Clusters of pins cover vile organs of an untraceable origin. His objects are infused with menace and melancholy. A lingering Narcissism⁽²⁷⁾ may be found in some of his "treasures." He has made "models" of tombs and monuments that combine the "times" of ancient Egypt with the most disposable futures of science fiction.⁽²⁸⁾

TIME AND HISTORY AS OBJECTS

At the turn of the century a group of colorful French artists banded together in order to get the jump on the bourgeois notion of progress. This bohemian brand of progress gradually developed into what is sometimes called the avant-garde. Both these notions of duration are no longer absolute modes of "time" for artists. The avant-garde, like progress, is based on an ideological consciousness of time. Time as ideology has produced many uncertain "art histories" with the help of the mass-media. Art histories may be measured in time by books (years), by magazines (months), by newspapers (weeks and days), by radio and TV (days and hours). And at the gallery proper—*instants!* Time is brought to a condition that breaks down into "abstract-objects⁽²⁹⁾." The isolated time of the avant-garde has produced its own unavailable history or entropy.

Consider the avant-garde as Achilles and progress as the Tortoise in a race that would follow Zeno's second paradox of "infinite regress⁽³⁰⁾." This non-Aristotelian logic defies the formal deductive system and says that "movement is impossible." Let us paraphrase Jorge Luis Borges' description of that paradox. (See *Avatars of the Tortoise*): The avant-garde goes ten times faster than progress, and gives progress a headstart of ten meters. The avant-garde goes those ten meters, progress one; the avant-garde completes that meter, progress goes a decimeter; the avant-garde goes that decimeter, progress goes a centimeter; the avant-garde goes that centimeter, progress, a millimeter; the avant-garde, the millimeter, progress a tenth of a millimeter; and so on to infinity without progress ever being overtaken by the avant-garde. The problem may be reduced to this series:

$$10 + 1 + 1/10 + 1/100 + 1/1000 + 1/10,000 + \dots$$

"Chemically speaking, our blood is analogous in composition to the primordial seas. Following the spiral steps we return to our origins, back to some pulpy protoplasm, a floating eye adrift an antediluvian ocean..."¹⁸

THE MUD POOL PROJECT

1. Dig up 100 sq. ft. of earth with a pitch fork
2. Get a local fire department to fill the well with water
3. The area will be finished when it turns to mud
4. Let it dry under the sun until it turns to clay
5. Repeat the process at will¹⁹



SPLASHING WITH FOUR MOULDS, TO EVA HESSE

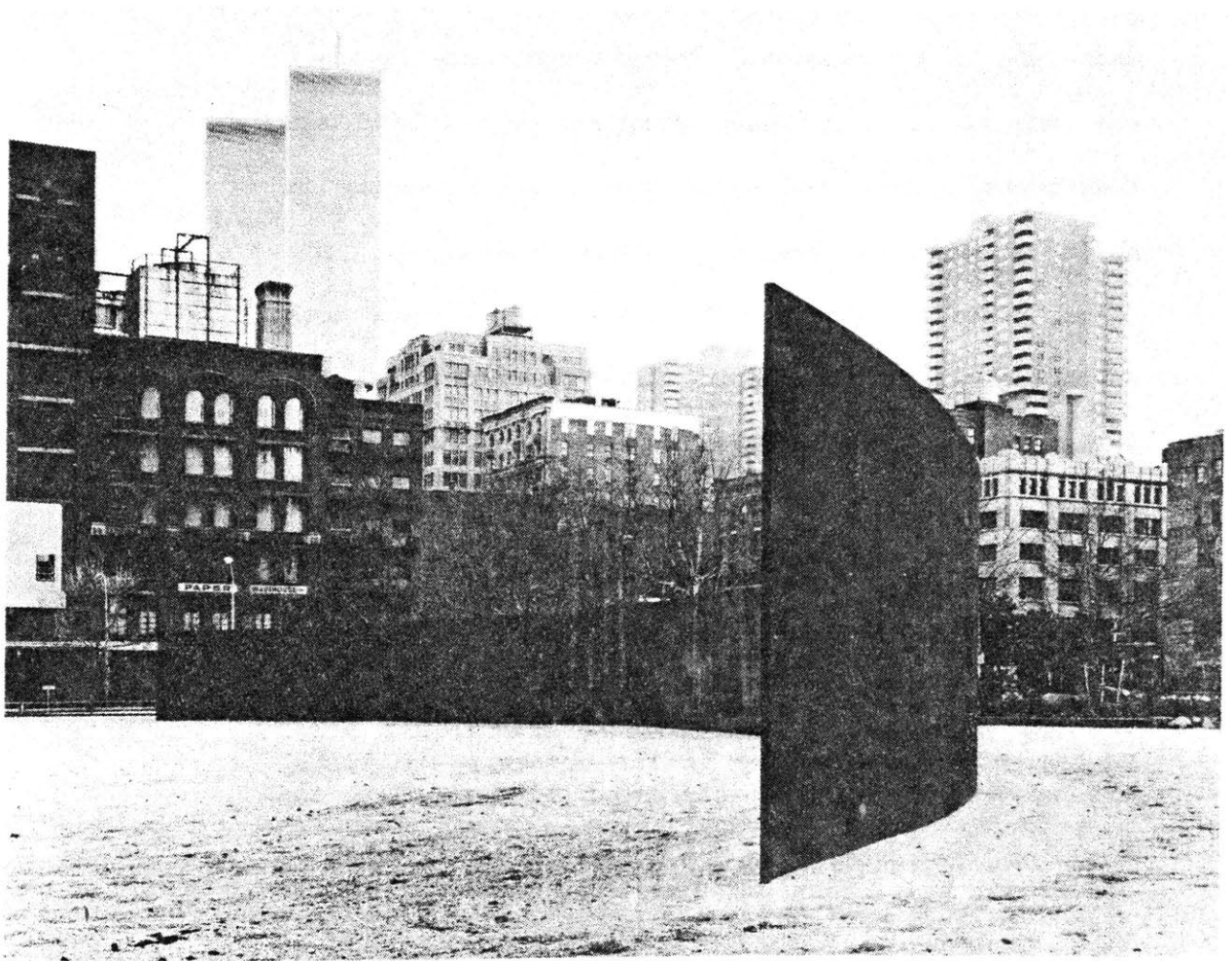
Lead, 30' x 30' x 30½, 1969

RICHARD SERRA

Serra places man in the center of the world. He believes in a cultural dialectic of work and time where man is the measure. Serra's sculpture is about the meaning of work whose products contain and are constructed from lived experience. His sculpture is built of man-made steel in urban landscapes. His films, process, urban and landscape sculpture are both psychological and pragmatic where the individual experiences the work through his own memory and physicality. The work is not static; both the materials (steel) and the context (city) change in time as does the individual moving through the work.

*" The piece that I am building now (Sight Point 72-75) is about standing in the center. The center are spaces. So I am interested in centering, the positioning of a vertical axis. Your body is defining the center by where you have to move to understand it. When not only the centering of the place of work but the centering of yourself in that place becomes the condition of the work-to hold you in a position of being able to perceive the entirety of the structure by locating yourself at the core. "*²⁰

Serra is constructing, not arranging. His deliberate structuring and ordering reject sculptural pictorialism and allusion. The medium (line, steel, film) is the carrier of meaning. The work has no "romantic, historical, architectural, aesthetic or picturesque pretensions, no commercial or symbolic



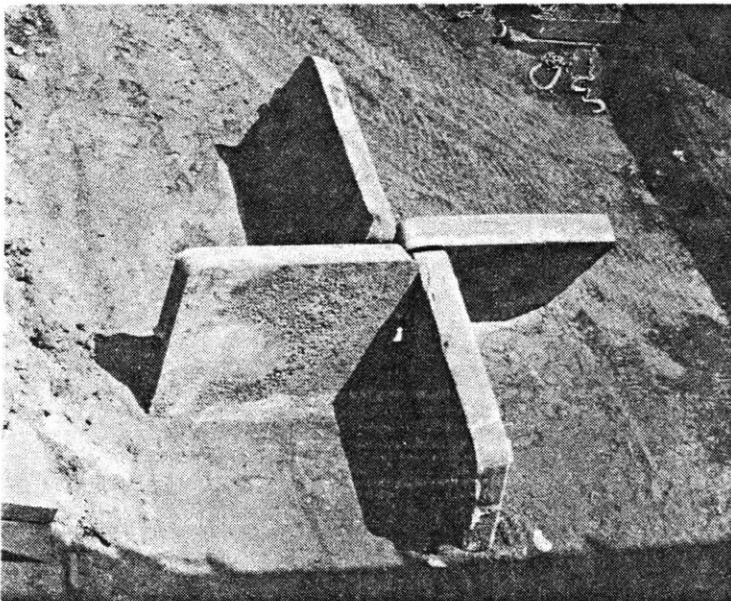
ST. JOHN'S ROTARY ARC

New York City, Rotary at Holland
Tunnel exit.

Cor-Ten steel, 200' x 12' x 2½"

references."²¹ Serra makes the clear distinction between the opticality of Irwin, Bell, Turrel and Nauman and the physicality of his own work. His own work does not enhance or frame a location, but creates a definite 'place'. Its experience is not illusive and immaterial, but extremely tangible, man-made and understandable.

" I think that if a work is substantial, in terms of its context, then it does not embellish, decorate or point to specific buildings, nor does it add to a syntax that already exists. I think the sculpture, if it has any potential at all, has the potential to create its own place and space, and to work in contradiction to the spaces and places where it is created in this sense. I am interested in work where the artist is the maker of an "anti-environment" which takes its own place and makes its own situation, or divides and declares its own area...I am interested in a sculpture which is non-utilitarian, non-functional... any use is a mis-use. I am not interested in sculpture which conventionalizes metaphors of content or assimilates architectonic spiritual sculptures, for there is no socially shared metaphysic."²²



ROBERT IRWIN

In 1970 Robert Irwin left his studio, and decided to go anywhere, anytime, in response. In his ten years as a painter, he questioned his work until he understood that the frame of his painting was a container (perceptual, hence cultural) which defined how and what he saw and experienced. The frame of the painting was not 'neutral' nor was any naive experience possible; in fact this frame would shape the questions and hold the answers; the boundaries were set. For art to encompass other subjects and experience, it would first have to abandon its clothing.

" Furthermore, there is probably no such thing as a naive perception of the world. As noted earlier, we do not begin at the beginning of such matters but already somewhere in the middle. F.E. Conceive in your mind the idea of a straight line (which has limited actuality in nature). In extended time, consider our 'straight line' as the basis for a compounded abstraction known as Euclidean geometry. Again in extended time, consider the world developed and structured in line with our concept i.e. grid to city; frame to plane to painting, point to point as a way of procedure through life. Now place yourself in the middle of this milieu as the actual (physical) frame of your experiential reference, your reality, and ask yourself "What can I know". "23

Irwin decided to give up a dialogue within the boundaries of his painting, and set out to respond to the complexities of phenomena and perception. In the wall, scrim, tape and plexiglass installations of the

next ten years, Irwin reveals the museum container; creating a highly optical and immaterial environment exposing the underlying grids of architectural and urban spaces. Surprise and anticipation are important qualities of these pieces; they rely on the active presumptions of their viewers.

In a catalogue for a 1977 Whitney Retrospective called "Notes for a Model" Robert Irwin shows how sense perception is transformed into formalism. The model is as follows:

Perception (pure re-presentation) of tactile data

Conception (to organize and attempt to understand) perception

Form (to give form/symbol/act) the individual's private vs. his social being: commune-communicate-community

Formful (written language, memory, history) standards based on objective criterion.

Formal (separation of object and subject) form as separate from content, self, and the world/logic and reason.

Formalism strict adherence to, or dependence on prescribed or established forms. Formalism again comprehends and expresses the nature of things.

The impact of Irwin's work is its insistence on experience as an active state, rather than a passive contemplation of an art object.

FOOTNOTES

7. Italo Calvino, "Invisible Cities", (Harcourt and Brace, New York, 1974), p. 104.
8. "Alice Aycock: Projects and Proposals 1971-1978", (Muhlenberg College, Penn.), 1979.
9. Ibid, see Stuart Morgan's introduction.
10. Neil Larsen, "Epic Theory", unpublished thesis, Minneapolis, MN
11. Italo Calvino, "Invisible Cities", (Harcourt and Brace, New York, 1974), p. 104.
12. Scott Burton calls himself an "impersonator of design". See Catalogue for 1978 Exxon National Exhibition: "Young American Artists", Guggenheim Museum, N.Y.C., p. 19.
13. p. 4, Kevin Lynch "Image of the City."
14. p. 127, "The Writings of Robert Smithson."
15. p. 127, IBID.
16. Robert Smithson, "Some Void Thoughts on Museums", "What is a Museum?...", "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art", pp. 58-67 in "Writings of Robert Smithson."
17. pp. 117-127, "Writings of Robert Smithson."
18. IBID
19. p. 88, "Writings of Robert Smithson"
20. Richard Serra, "Richard Serra: Interviews, Etc. 1970-1980", (Hudson River Museum, N.Y. 1980), p.55.
21. IBID, p. 128
22. IBID, p. 128
23. Robert Irwin, "Notes Towards a Model", (Whitney Museum, N.Y., 1977), p. 25.

PART THREE: PUBLIC FUNDING FOR THE ARTS

" As a general practise, Americans develop concepts only in response to immediate and identifiable needs. It was fortunate that a concept of the role of government in relation to the arts had been conceived by a wise man in response to the immediate needs of a great arts institution. The Metropolitan Opera Association was involved in a wage dispute in late 1960..."²⁴

Short of other precedents, support for the arts in America resided in charitable private patronage. The standards of excellence and conditions of support were formulated by the wealthiest and most exclusive members of our society, who organized cultural activities, set the standards, and sponsored institutions and individual artists. Museums, galleries, salons, mansions and private collections have historically housed most art. 'Standards of Excellence' carefully omitted the work of women, ethnic minorities and other work of poor taste, and have continued unchallenged into the last two decades. Our 'neutral' containers claim to offer these works, generously and unbiased to a larger American public. Public support for the arts is still frozen at 2% of the population. Art is viewed by its public as a leisure activity, disconnected from their lives. 'De Toqueville noted that even for a cultured minority, the arts had become nothing more than a transient if necessary recreation from the serious labors of life.'²⁵ Only recently, due

to economic conditions and tax laws, when private patronage could no longer support the rising costs of public arts institutions, did the shift from private to public patronage occur.

The Manchester Guardian of November 30, 1977 stated that the Arts Council "is a village post around which a new town has grown. It was designed for a kind of do-gooding...when the government controlled only 45% of the National Income. Now the government controls more than 60% of the National Income; it has to compensate the arts for the loss of income from other sources...".²⁶

" Mr. Rockefeller, in 1956 made a speech to a group of business people, where he indicated to them that the arts were in jeopardy; no longer were there people like Mrs...Belmont, or Mr. Auto Chan, who could underwrite the entire deficit of the Metropolitan Opera. The tax structures in this country preclude this kind of activity, and so he said it is up to the business community today, to look at the arts as something in which he must get involved, because the arts are in jeopardy and need help. Corporations are now, he said, the seat of money and the seat of power. So he suggested that perhaps a group of businessmen could sponsor such an activity, which they did in 1967, and the Business Committee for the Arts was formed."²⁷

The Arts Council movement began shortly after WW2 as a response to keep symphonic music alive during the period of the war. The British Arts Council was the 'grandmother' of the Arts Council Movement. "The Agencies of Hope" followed in France, which sought to distribute Parisian culture to the provinces, where

they would install houses of culture, film, libraries, theatres and homes for artists etc. For a variety of reasons, these efforts were unsuccessful, as they assumed that art could be generated in a vacuum. "You cannot have them by government fiat, and there has to be a kind of infrastructure which works along with other elements of society."²⁸ The centralization of the French Arts Council Movement had to be discarded, and replaced by a more decentralized plan. The Arts Council Movement in America developed in the 1960's alongside public foundations like the NEA. Although the American movement followed the European movement by 10 years, it branched out quickly and generated a good deal of activity. In the early legislature, a provision by the Federal Partnership Program provided matching funds for individual states, initiating the arts council movement in the U.S.

The National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965 was signed September 29th, 1965 by President Johnson. This act of '65 created the National Endowment for the Arts as an indirect supporter and employer of the arts. Nancy Hanks, who served as council chairman between the years of '69-'77 believed that the central purpose of government funding for the arts was to generate more support from private sources. BCA did a survey in 1979 and

found that Business support for the Arts climbed from 21 million in 1967 to 436 million in 1979. Six principles embodied in the act helped shape the role of government as patron of the arts between '70-'78:

- 1) Excellence: Production which has substantial artistic and cultural merit giving emphasis to the maintenance and encouragement of professional excellence. This clause refuses to fund minority projects on ethnic grounds alone, and resists the introduction of quotas into funding artist/art organizations.
- 2) Professionalism: The identification of excellence ("discernment") between '70-'78 rested on the Endowment's ability to recruit the best professional advisors and insulate them against all external pressures. Advisory panels play a major role in Endowment program areas. In 1973 congress reaffirmed the chairman's right to appoint the panelists, encouraging broad geographic representation. The panelists were to be: 1) appointed by merit, 2) serve as individuals, not representatives of special interests, institutions, viewpoints, 3) insulated from any external pressure.
- 3) Independence: No agency of the government is wholly autonomous. The Arts Endowment was created as a public foundation at the autonomous end of the political spectrum. It is an independent agency within the legal shell of the National foundation. Each chairman is appointed for four years.
- 4) Non-Intervention: The fear that government patronage of the arts would lead to intervention was a principal concern of the artist in '65. This provision is directed towards institutions: 'in the administration of this act, no department officer or employee of the US shall exercise any direction, supervision or control over policy determination, personnel or curriculum or administration or operations in any school, institution, organization or associations.
- 5) Non-Dominance: The threat that the government will dominate the cultural life of the nation through the predominance of funding arts organizations and institutions.

- 6) Decentralization: Decentralization, brought about by the creation of state and community art agencies to which federal funds can be administered.²⁹

Within the working of the National Endowment's philosophy was the belief that all great art must be strengthened by great patronage. The details of the administration of that patronage continue to cause disagreement and redefinition. Like any government agency, the NEA cannot insulate itself from the interests of its constituents.

The Business Committee for the Arts was created in 1967 to convince businessmen to support the arts. The arts from the point of view of business are inefficient and labor-intensive. The more successful the arts, the more they are in financial jeopardy. BUSINESS MUST HAVE A RATIONALE FOR DOING ANYTHING. The BCA, as 'self-appointed missionaries', set out to convince corporations and business that to associate their name with the arts is the best investment available. It would cost a corporation ten times the money to change its image alone, and by sponsoring publically visible arts organizations, it would accomplish the same job.

" The BCA is very much like the missionaries of the Old Victorian Church; we run around the breadth and width of this land converting the businessman to the idea that the arts are important and that they must be supported by him. And like the missionaries, we are supported by those who have converted, and who feel that this is a very important thing, and who in fact do support the arts and are willing to support us while we go around and teach the orations. So our basic thrust is to convince and convert the businessman to the idea that the arts are

tremendously important in the community, and he must look at them the way he has traditionally looked at religion and hospitals, the YMCA's and health and welfare and education. This is really the mission of the Business Committee for the Arts. "30

The BCA has, for the most part succeeded in providing business with a rationale to support the arts. Corporate giving now occupies \$.14 of each corporate dollar. The Boston Branch of Poloroid Corporation has seven departments including a Poloroid collection, foundation, acquisition grants, publicity department, advertising and design, research and corporate 'communications' which support local and national artists. There is a public relations department, a publicity department or community affairs department within small businesses, which provide support. However, largely the individual artist is "low man on the totem pole"³¹ unless he is hooked up with a public institution.

Private foundations, which are non-profit organizations (with the status of tax exemption) are specifically set up to provide support for the individual artist. There are several kinds of foundations:

- 1) Family: largest number of foundations
- 2) General Service/Mego: foundations created through two or three different programs.
- 3) Special Purpose Foundations: the donors of these foundations have a special purpose for their funds.
- 4) Company-Sponsor: corporations set aside a fixed amount every year, with a separate staff to administer it.

- 5) Community Trusts: groups set aside funds as a permanent charity or trust fund.

Private foundations tend to put a great deal of emphasis on education. Unlike the NEA, but similar to corporations, these foundations have special interests. Since they are non-governmental, they try to fund work that the government cannot fund.³²

PUBLIC ART AND PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Where there is public investment there must be public accountability. The American public must support the direction of its tax dollars. More importantly it must understand arts meaning and relevance to their lives. The artistic monologue which has characterized much of the last hundred years, has made art seem difficult, critical and abstract. This condition grew out of a conviction that art should serve no other purpose than its own, reject its servile attempt at representation, and develop an abstract art, larger than the individual, greater than the symbol, the narrative, the ordinary. Modernism has represented a transcendent spirit both in the fine arts and the applied arts, and as such distanced itself from a confused public who seek out criticism to bridge and interpret this work. 'Arts for art's sake' was coddled and nurtured by an aristocratic class of patrons, who unlike the larger public would encourage this eclecticism and interpret its meaning (for us). Art became free of interpretation. In its privacy, art created a monologue. 'Public art' was always servile to awful representation and glorified unlikely empires.

The distinction of public art as being something more than funded by the state, more than being

outdoors, more than being a tribute to a cause, emerged shakily in the last few years. An effort to make art more meaningful and connected to its public coincided with public support for the arts. This creates an unusual situation. In other words the work must reach its public if it is to survive. How this can be done creates a tremendous question. A few months ago when speaking with a community organizer about a sculpture installation which i planned for the local park, her immediate response was that she had been advocating some public monuments for the park for several years. Anything that will prevent local boys from ruining the grass with their basketball. Was I planning that kind of public work?

Clearly there is a long way to go before an understanding of a different kind of public work will emerge. Involving the community with the work will avoid a great deal of misunderstanding and lawsuits. More importantly it will demystify the act. The answer however, does not lie in providing for or meeting public expectations or analyzing public desires. Rather it lies in the structuring of an experience which can somehow engage the collective memories and insight of a community. No analytical tools (including anthropological or sociological studies) can begin to interpret the complex needs and workings

of a community, or individual...so the question arises again... what is public art and what is public accountability?

A public art in my opinion, is an art which is not culturally exclusive, one which certainly does not have any fixed or specific properties. A public art is one which goes beyond its own purpose. Public accountability is not accountability to the state, to the arts council or to the foundation which administers the funds. It is involvement through a community in every capacity as an artist.

THE PUBLIC FOUNDATION AS A BI-PARTISAN ORGANIZATION

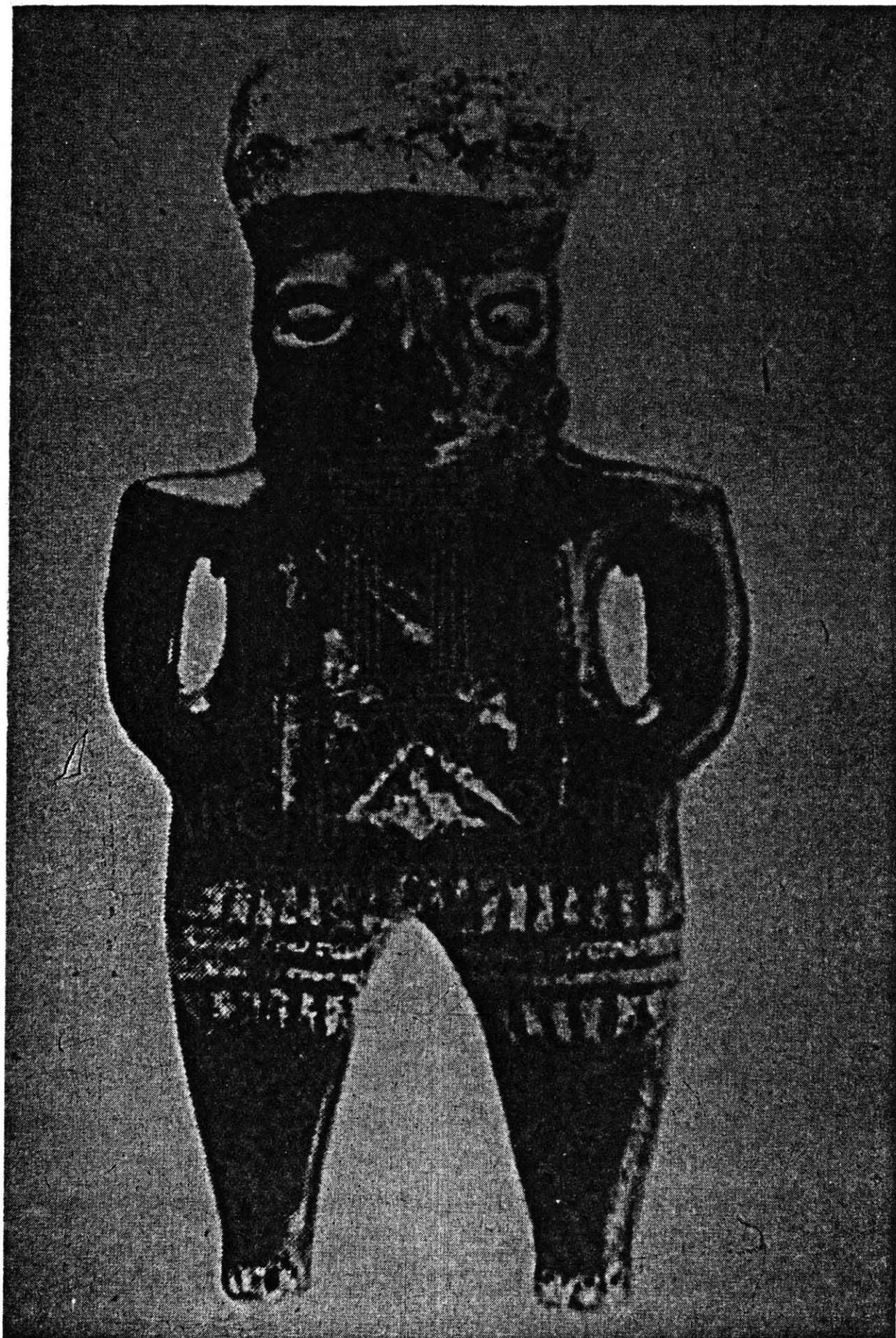
The public foundation was created as a bi-partisan organization to administer funds for artists and arts organizations. If we look carefully at the principles of a public foundation like the National Endowment for the Arts, we begin to see the contradictions implicit in their formulation. The principles of excellence, professionalism, independence, non-intervention, non-dominance and decentralization appear to be values independent of any cultural bias. Values of "excellence" and "professionalism" exclude work on ethnic grounds alone. Identifying these qualities of "excellence" rest with the Endowment's ability to recruit the best "professionals" or experts in the field. In the early 20th century the "experts" were those individuals who held the power and support for the Arts. Now we appoint individuals who reach their stature through education, success in their fields, knowledge of their subjects. This professionalism has not prevented entire retrospectives of 20th century art to be restricted to white male artists, notwithstanding the last 5 years (e.g. the Whitney Biennial). This formulation of policy is a contradiction in terms. No government agency or program can be insulated from external pressure, or interest groups. The most informed professionals cannot help but sup-

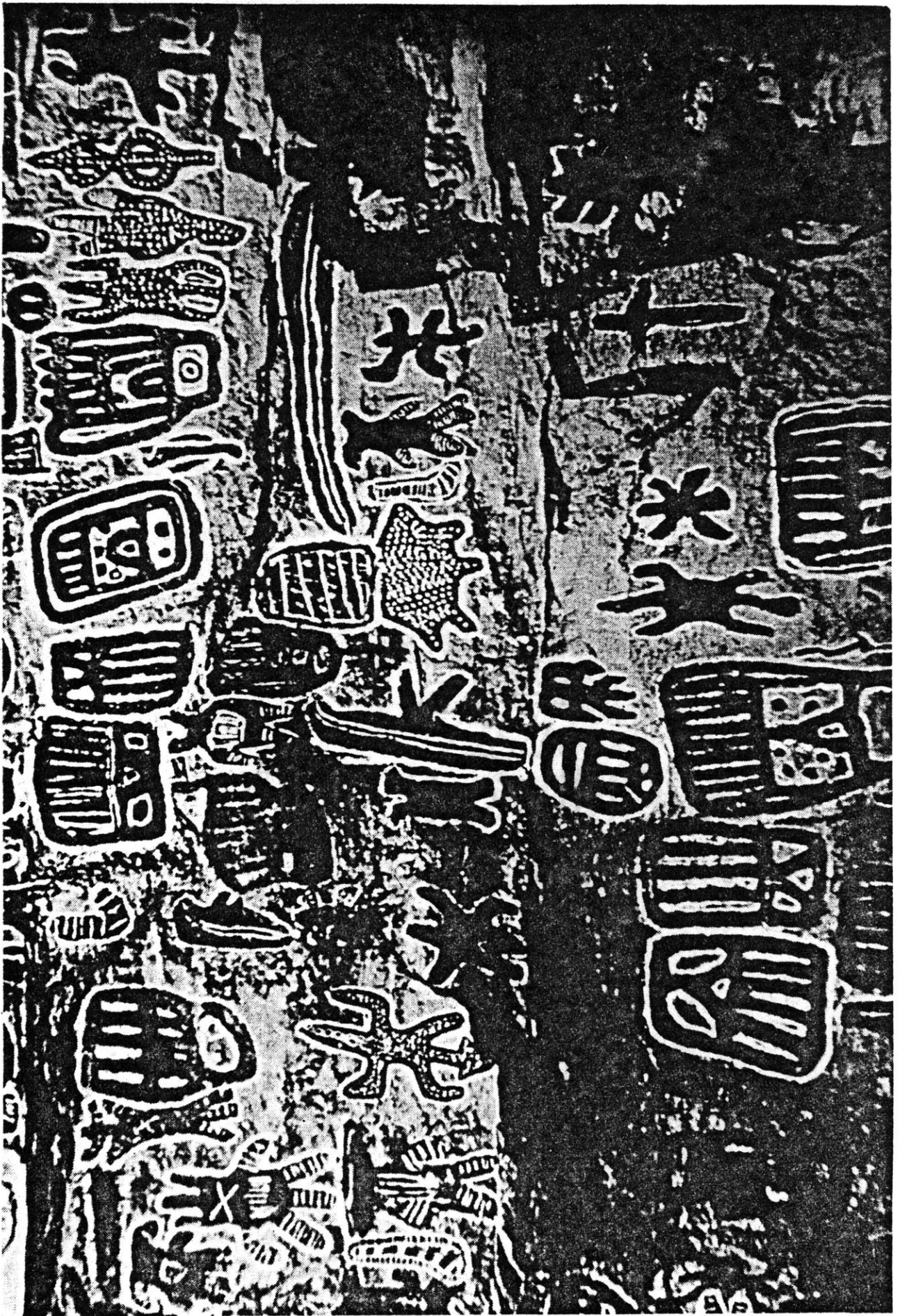
port very specific viewpoints about "quality in art". WHY should the National Endowment for the Arts be immunized against the normative political processes? Is there quality in art over and beyond the specific ethnic character of a region's constituents?

Clearly excellence in the arts is culturally determined, through class, stature and education. Many culturally ambiguous and charged words such as "taste" and "beauty" serve to continue a biased interpretation of art. Critics, curators, dealers and panelists in adhering to the principles of "excellence" keep art sheltered by an in-house definition. The diversity of experience with its strange and undefinable twists cannot be housed within the label of "excellence". High art is then separated from its counterpart, low art, craft becomes cut off from its origin art, and a narrowly defined and illustrated version of art is left.

FOOTNOTES

24. See Transcript from IAP Council for the Arts Seminar, M.I.T.: Michael D'Amelio, Business Committee for the Arts, N.Y.C., 1/19/81.
25. Michael Straight, "Twigs for an Eagle's Nest", (Devon Press, N.Y., 1979) p. 52.
26. IBID, p. 74.
27. See Transcript from IAP Council for The Arts Seminar, M.I.T.: Michael D'Amelio, B.C.A. 1/19/81.
28. See transcript from IAP Seminar, M.I.T.: Michael D'Amelio, B.C.A., 1/19/81.
29. IBID, pp. 69-99.
30. See transcript from IAP Seminar, M.I.T.: Peter Hackman, Council for The Arts at M.I.T., 1/12/81.
31. See transcript from IAP Seminar, M.I.T.: Samuel Yanes, Vice President of Corporate Communications, Poloroid Corp., Boston, MA, 1/19/81.
32. See transcript from IAP Seminar, M.I.T.: Debbie Hoover, Council for the Arts at M.I.T., 1/20/81.





SIGN LANGUAGE EXCHANGE: AN INSTALLATION IN COMPTON COURT, M.I.T.

APRIL 6TH-APRIL 20TH

"Sign Language Exchange" is concerned with signs and symbols in the landscape, in architecture, and on highways. It questions how these signs are interpreted both personally and socially; how they are 'placed' and experienced in the landscape. The placing of these signs is intimately tied to their message, their meanings, their "face:". "Sign Language Exchange" is an exchange of rural and urban sign systems, their literal and metaphoric possibilities.

The installation of work in Compton Court at M.I.T. originated with an idea of implanting several 'booths' in an open trafficked area on campus. There were to be pathways connecting the different booths, much like you find in a small town. This installation was to be called "American Barns, Booths and Sheds". It culminated much of the work I have been doing in Massachusetts; an interest in rural architecture, particularly barns, agricultural buildings and sheds. I was interested in the "fronts" of buildings; how they mark off territory, becoming graphic symbols of an interior structure, and focus or center a landscape. Barn gates, removed from their original locations reappear as graphic renditions on garages, in suburbs, on front doors. These graphic renditions of barn doors, fencing, building structure borrow their meaning from the original. The first drawings for the installation of booths, led way to another set of drawings for "fronts" or "facades", implanted in the ground and distributed throughout the courtyard. They combined rural building

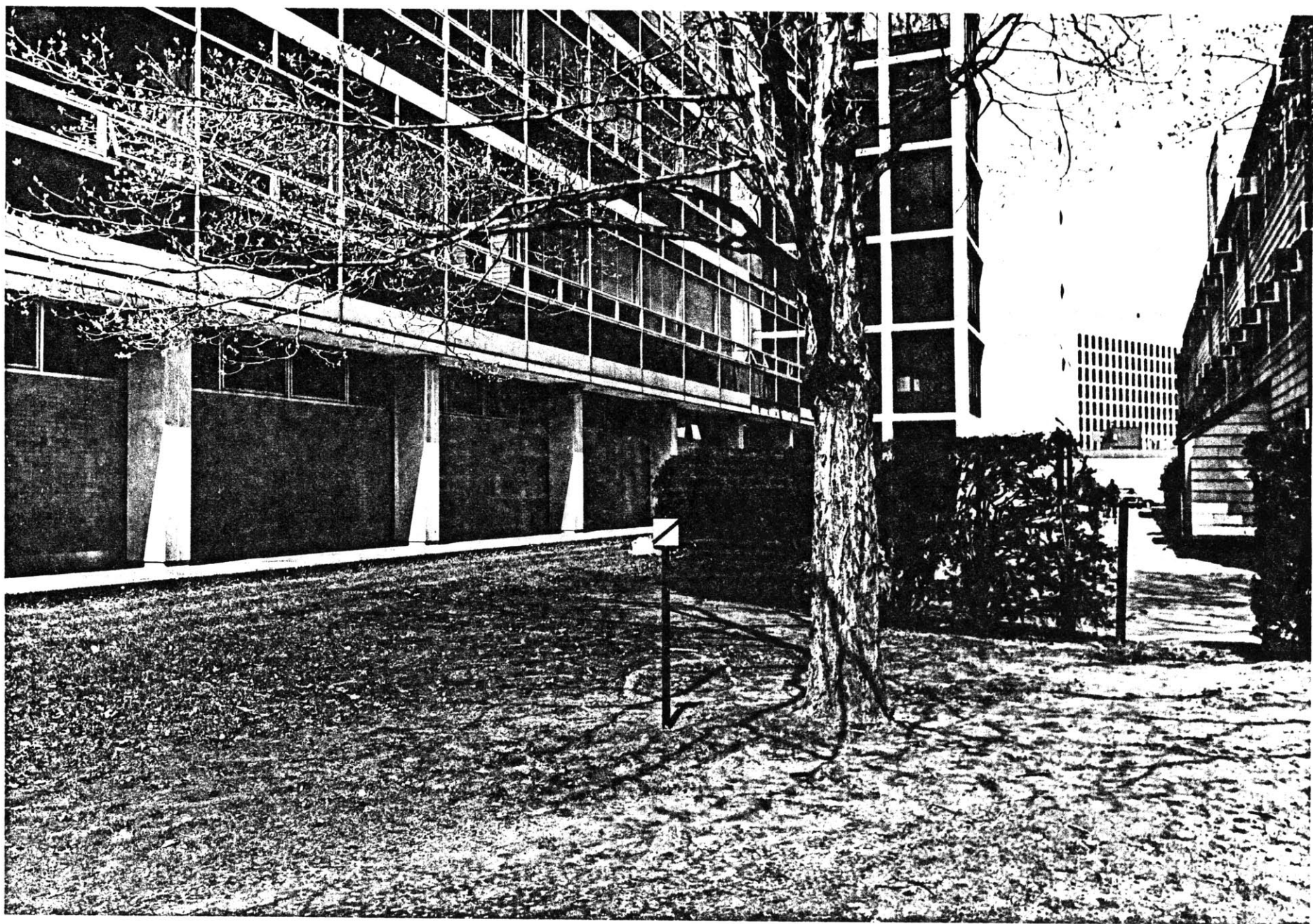


structure with attached signs of vinyl and plexiglass. These pieces were "hacksawed"; too literal and arbitrary in their place in the court. Several issues came to the fore:

- *The idea of building as sign (barn gate)
- *The idea of sign as building (agricultural buildings: Hardy's Hatchery, Purina Cat Chow, etc.)
- *The idea of literal signage as metaphor (highway signs, "caution fencing"
- *The idea of graphic measures (eg. mile markers on highways)

The final series of drawings were made several weeks prior to the installation date in Compton Court. I hoped to take the patterns of activity in Compton Court itself into account. Rather than implant freestanding "facades" or enclosed "booths" which would stand isolated; I decided that I would design some pieces to be located in the courtyard, much like highway signs, billboards, fences are "found" in the landscape. I did not want them to have a sculptural presence, but rather that of unfinished structures one might accidentally encounter. F.E. walking down Main Street in Cambridge, you cross paths with a "mock-up" of a large building that is under construction. This curious facade, I find, releases something in the imagination which the constructed building does not.

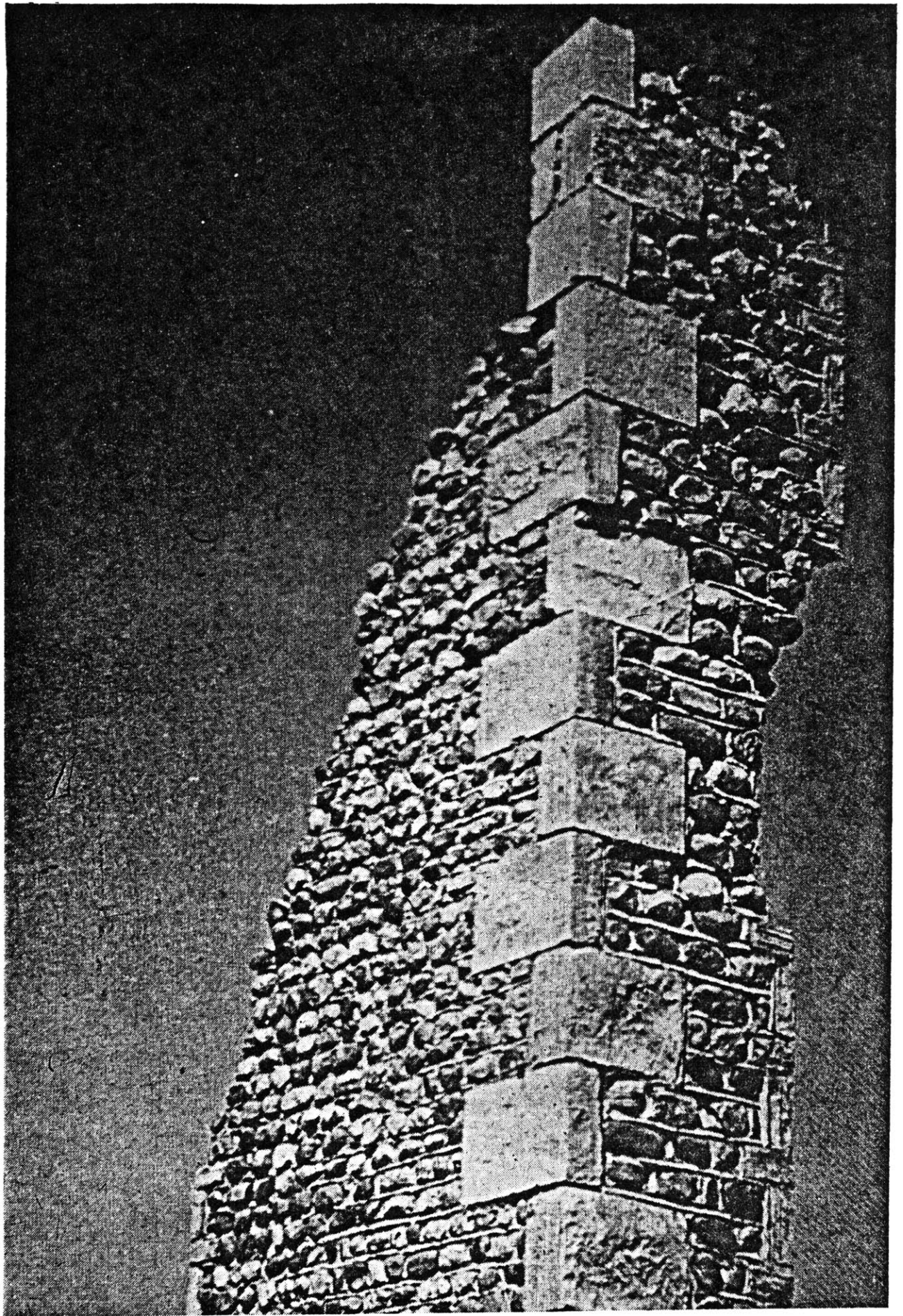
All of the drawings for the installation were made from what I assumed to be the major entrance to the court; from inside the institute, facing building 20-E. The strongest axis, therefore results from that view. Once inside the courtyard, it became obvious that there are actually three major entrances, and several well-worn paths crossing the court.



Compton Court trafficks a suprising number of people each hour. This activity is not fully realized in the installation. An extension of the smaller signs, might have made the entire installation more convincing from the point of view of tracing a personal path system.

All the pieces were "mapped out" according to a personal scale (a person moving through the courtyard), and had little to do with the scale of the surrounding buildings, nor a gate or fence's normal height. Several pieces in the installation were placed (conceived of) prior to their arrival at Compton Court. The two "Caution-Fencing" pieces were located on site, as were the smaller "signs". The small signs were the last to be situated, taking their cues as much from the existing landscape (bushes, fire-hydrants, pipes, entrances and exits etc.) as from the larger structures in the site. More could have been explored with these, particularly in relation to the larger structures. Occasionally, a smaller sign would overwhelm a larger structure, as one passed through the courtyard.

How people used these pieces, as well as the permanant sculptures in the Courtyard, became very evident during the day. Children climbed up and down, student's sunbathed on Beverly Pepper's "Dunes 1". People were attracted to the large "Caution-Fencing pieces and often congregated or slept by them. While children freely climbed the other large pieces in the courtyard, they did not feel comfortable with the "gates". People chained their bicycles to the small "signs", although these signs were only 4' high, and could easily be pulled from the ground.



CONVERSATIONS

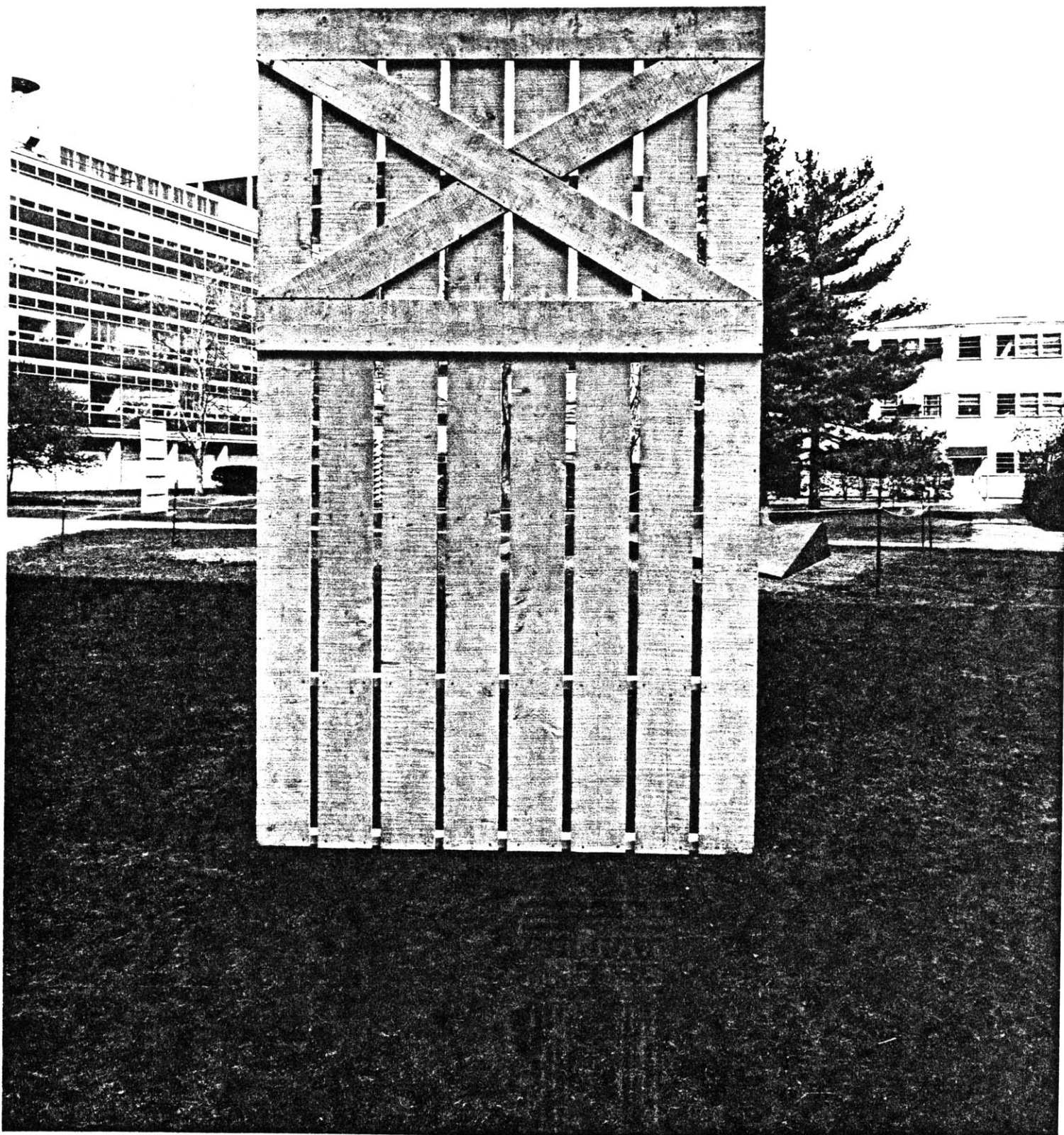
In general, the insight of the people who responded to the installation was tremendous. I learned a great deal from the responses, and the activity which surrounded the pieces during the two week period in April. Most of the responses revealed curiosity; often people would construct their own narratives around the pieces, some would identify the structures with adjacent institutions (ROTC), occasionally people would "map" out the installation, and provide me with additional information about the courtyard.

THE FIRST DAY OF THE INSTALLATION, A MEMBER OF THE STUDENT GROUP WHO DEMOLISHED THE NEVELSON SCULPTURE ON CAMPUS, "INTEROGATED ME" AS TO MY INTENTIONS. HIS MAJOR COMPLAINT WITH THE NEVELSON SCULPTURE WAS THAT SHE TOOK TWO DIFFERENT SCULPTURES AND THREW THEM TOGETHER; SHE HAD NO CONSIDERATION FOR THE STUDENTS USING THE SPACE, NOR DID SHE HAVE ENOUGH RESPECT TO DEVELOP A SCULPTURE FOR THE SPACE. THE YARD, WHICH HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN USED FOR BASEBALL ECT. WAS NOW "USELESS", AND THE SCULPTURES CARELESS OF THE STUDENTS WHO LIVE WITH THEM. ALTHOUGH THIS MIT STUDENT HAD LITTLE IDEA OF WHAT HE WOULD LIKE TO SEE IN A PUBLIC WORK, HE HAD NEVER HAD THE OPPORTUNITY OF SPEAKING WITH AN ARTIST PRIOR TO OR DURING AN INSTALLATION OF WORK. WITH MY INSTALLATION, HE WANTED TO "MAKE SOME TROUBLE" BUT LEFT WITH CURIOSITY AND PLANS?



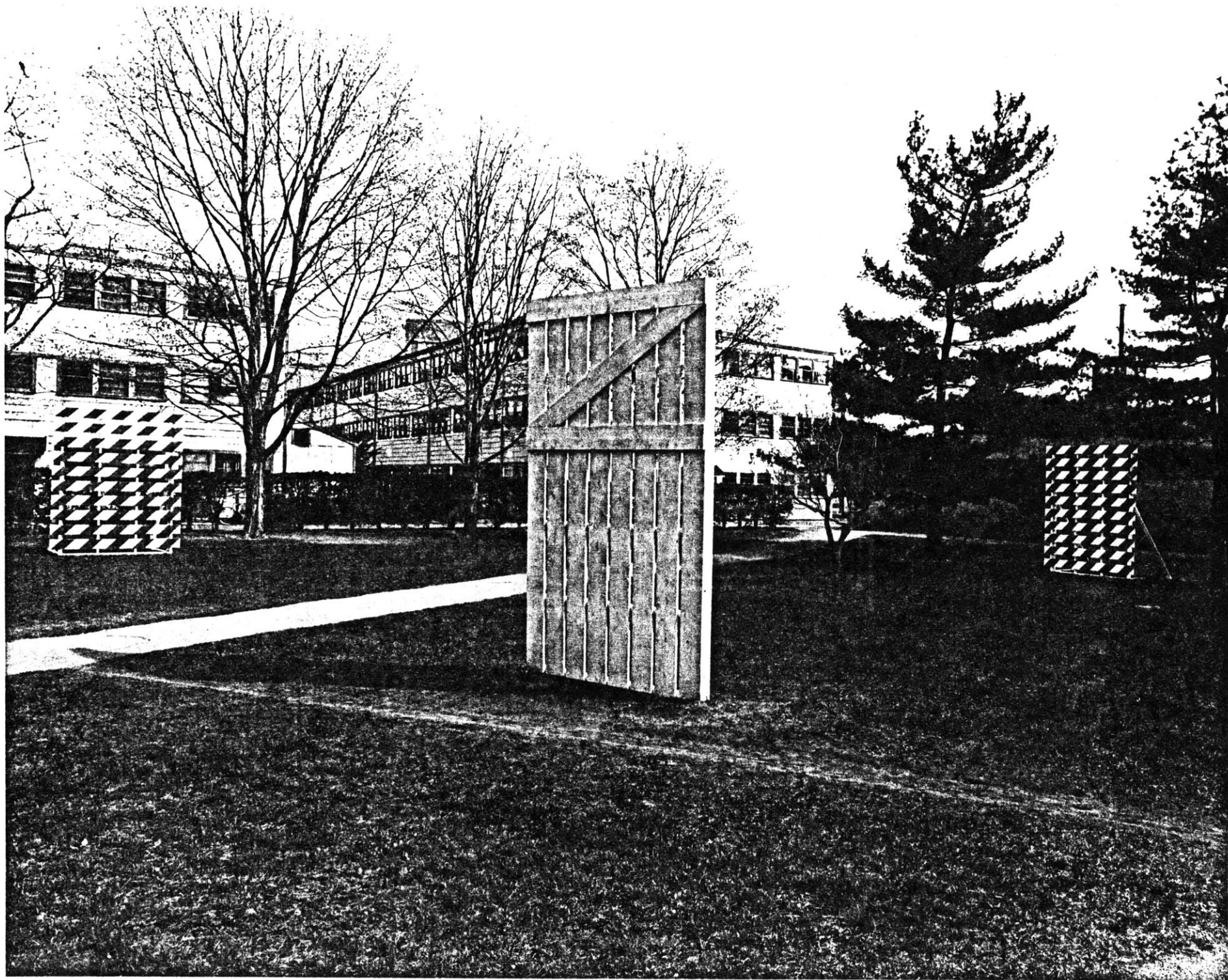
A WOMAN FROM THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA WALKED THROUGH THE COURTYARD, AND ASKED ME WHAT THE LARGE STRIPED STRUCTURES WERE? SHE SAID THAT IN CHINESE OPERA, THERE ARE GATES, WHICH ARE NOT REALLY GATES (THEY ARE NON-FUNCTIONAL) BUT THEY ARE IMAGINARY GATES AROUND WHICH THE NARRATIVE DEVELOPS. I TOLD HER THAT THESE "GATES" WERE LITERALLY TAKEN FROM THE HIGHWAYS, BUT THAT THEY COULD VERY WELL BE IMAGINARY GATES. SHE THANKED ME, AND SAID THEY REMINDED HER OF HOME.

A LANDSCAPER, WHO WALKED THROUGH THE COURTYARD ON A DAILY BASIS, ASKED ME "WHAT THE HELL ARE THESE THINGS IN THE COURTYARD?" HIS FACE WAS GRIMACING, AND I COULD TELL BY THE LOOK OF IT, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO CONVINCE HIM OF ANYTHING. I TRIED TO EXPLAIN THE HISTORY OF EACH PIECE AND WHAT "SIGN LANGUAGE" MEANT. HE LOOKED OVER HIS SHOULDER, THANKED ME AND QUICKLY LEFT. ABOUT ONE HOUR LATER HE RETURNED, AND ASKED ME IF I COULD TELL HIM A LITTLE MORE ABOUT THESE PIECES IN THE COURTYARD. WERE THEY ART? I SAID THAT I DIDN'T KNOW IF THEY WERE, THAT HOPEFULLY THEY PROVIDED SOMETHING FOR PEOPLE TO EXPERIENCE. HE THANKED ME AND LEFT. SEVERAL HOURS LATER, THE LANDSCAPER RETURNED, AND ASKED ME MY NAME..HE WANTED TO KNOW IN CASE I BECAME A FAMOUS ARTIST.



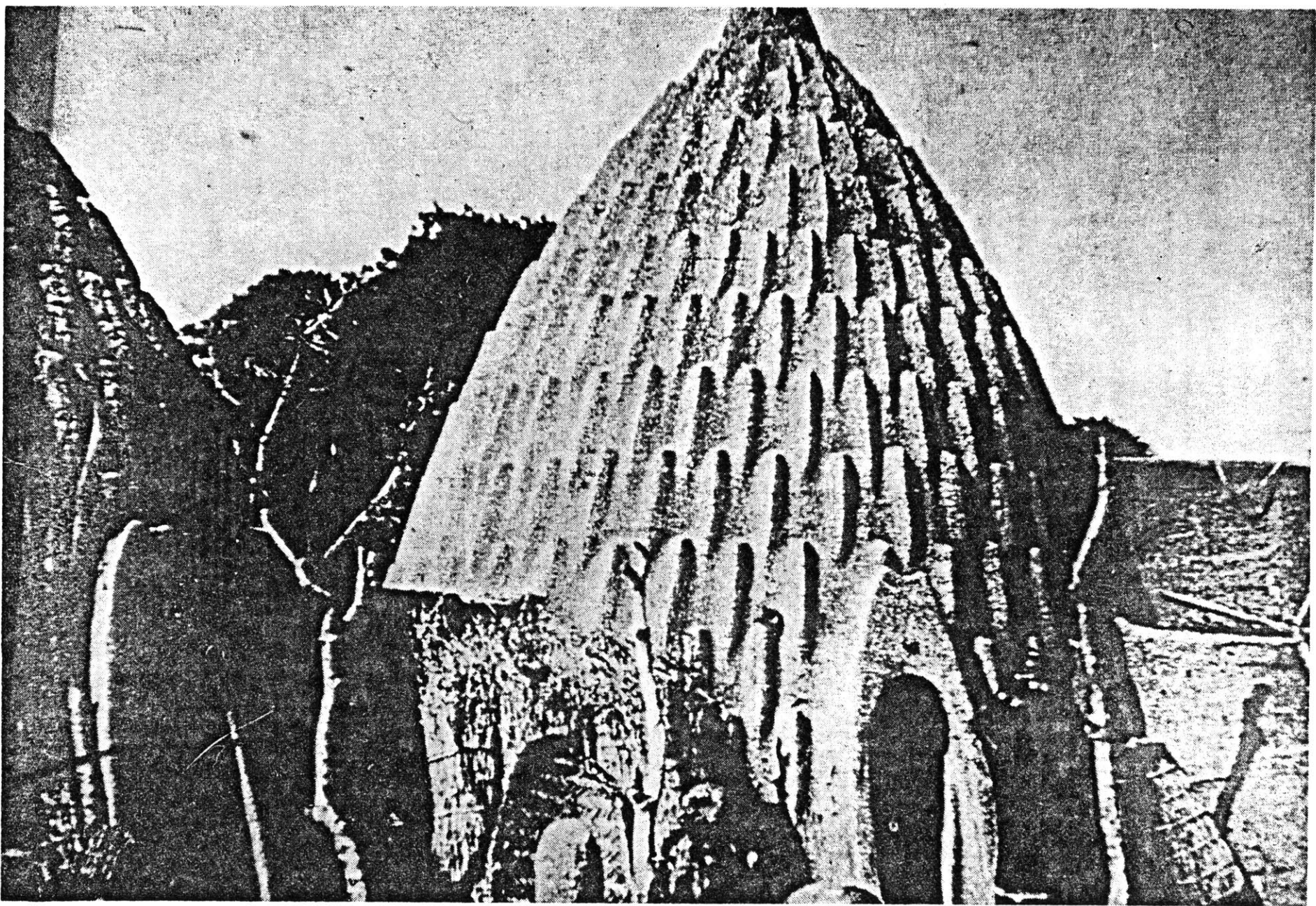
THE FIRST DAY OF THE INSTALLATION, SEVERAL ROTC PERSONELL APPROACHED ME, WITH SMILING FACES, AND ASKED ME WHETHER THESE STRUCTURES IN COMPTON COURT WERE TRAINING POSTS FOR ROTC STUDENTS. THEY LAUGHED AND SAID THAT THEY COULD USE THEM IF THEY WERE, BUT IF NOT WHAT WERE THEY? I RESPONDED THAT NO, IN FACT THEY WERE NOT ROTC TRAINING POSTS (ALTHOUGH I COULD UNDERSTAND THEIR RELEVANCE): THESE STRUCTURES WERE AN INSTALLATION CALLED "SIGN LANGUAGE EXCHANGE" IN WHICH I WAS JUXTAPOSING URBAN AND RURAL SIGNS AND SYMBOLS. THE STRIPED STRUCTURES WERE CALLED "CAUTION-FENCING OR IMAGINARY GATES" AND THEY WERE TAKEN FROM HIGHWAY SIGNS. WHAT ARE THEY FOR, THE ROTC PEOPLE ASKED? THEY CHUCKLED AND WALKED ON SMILING.

DURING THE ACTUAL INSTALLATION OF THE WORK AROUND 5:00PM AS THE SUN WAS GOING DOWN, THERE WAS STILL ONE "CAUTION-FENCING" PIECE TO INSTALL. FOR SOME REASON, EVERYWHERE I PLACED IT SEEMED ARBITRARY. I KNEW THAT I WANTED TO PLACE IT IN THE TREES, BY THE CORNER OF THE ALUMNI POOL, BUT HAD SPENT SEVERAL HOURS FINDING THE RIGHT SPOT. A VERY LARGE CROWD EMERGED FROM BEHIND THE ALUMNI POOL (AROUND 20 STUDENTS) AND VERY LOUDLY WANTED TO KNOW WHAT WAS GOING ON IN THE COURTYARD. WE EXPLAINED THAT WE WERE INSTALLING SOME SCULPTURE, AND WERE TRYING TO PLACE THE LAST "CAUTION-FENCING". IMMEDIATELY THE CROWD WAS PLACING BETS, AND INDIVIDUALS ASKED WHETHER THEY COULD SEE THE PIECE HERE..THERE..HERE ETC. ALTHOUGH THE PIECE WEIGHED OVER 150 POUNDS, WE DID SOME MOVING AND TOOK "VOTES". ALTHOUGH WE CONTINUED AFTER THE STUDENTS LEFT, BOTH THE STUDENTS AND OUR TEAM RESOLVED THE ISSUE, A WEEK LATER THEY MADE A BOISTEROUS RETURN TO VIEW THEIR PIECE.



THE PEOPLE WORKING IN THE SURROUNDING BUILDING TO COMPTON COURT, FOUND THE INSTALLATION A "CURIOSITY". FROM THE SEVENTH FLOOR OF THE PHYSICS BUILDING, THE PIECES APPEARED MUCH LIKE: "HORSE JUMPS", "THEATRE SETS", "ROTC TRAINING POSTS", "POETIC FENCES". THE SUDDEN APPEARANCE OF THESE STRUCTURES, AND THE ACTIVITY SURROUNDING THEM, PROVOKED MANY OF THESE INDIVIDUALS TO INTERRUPT THEIR EXPERIMENTS, TO FIND OUT WHAT WAS GOING ON. THROUGHOUT THE TWO WEEKS, INDIVIDUALS WOULD WANDER OUT TO FIND WHAT THE CHECKERBOARD CORNERS WAS, THE STRIPED STRUCTURES, OR THE NON-FUNCTIONAL GATES. SEVERAL WARNED ME THAT THEY RESEMBLED ROTC OPERATIONS..

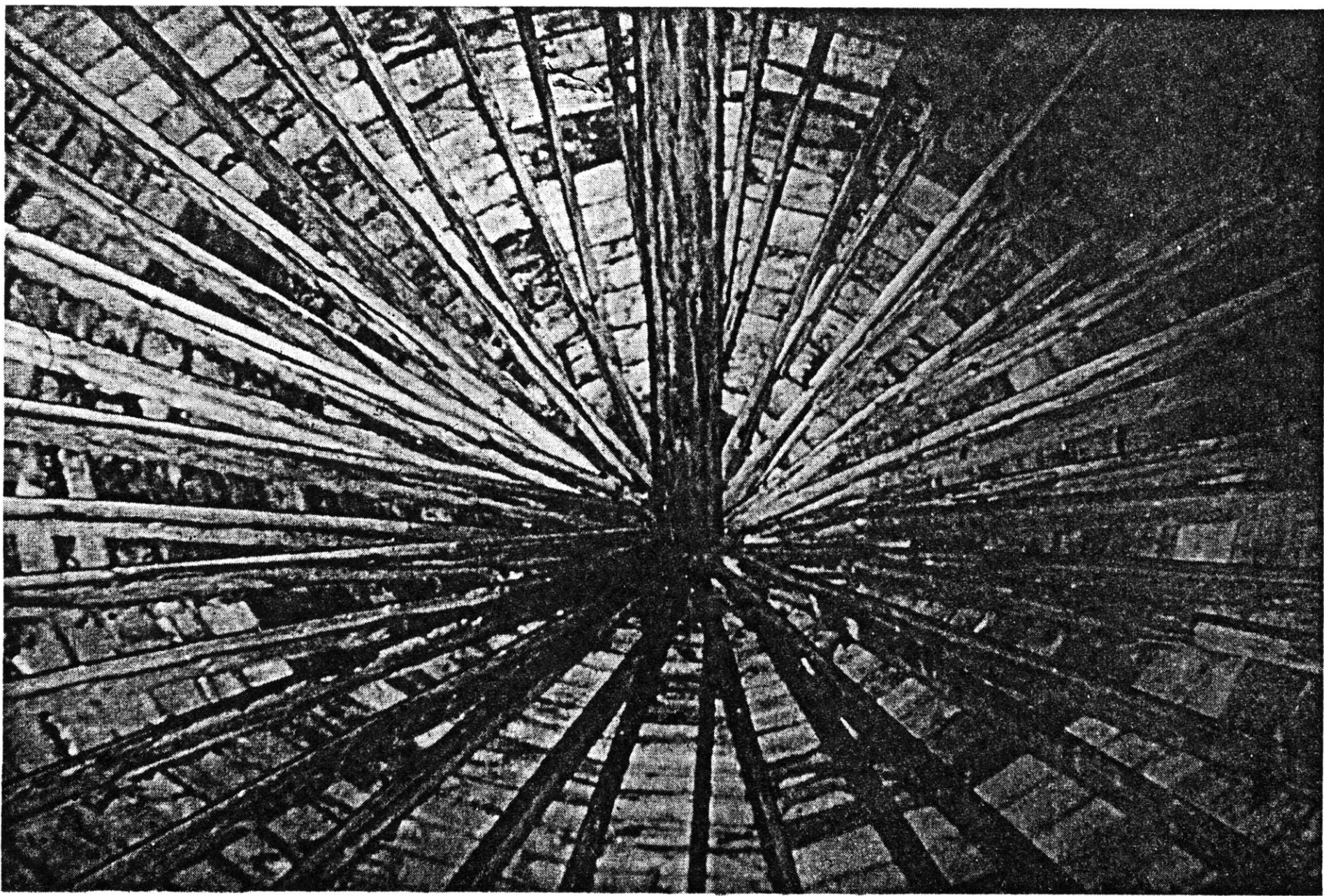
LAURENCE PICKARD, SUPERVISOR OF BUILDING OPERATIONS, WAS VERY ACTIVE DURING THE INSTALLATION IN COMPTON COURT. HE WOULD STOP BY FREQUENTLY DURING THIS PERIOD, WITH SOME SKEPTICAL ASSISTANTS. HE GAVE ME A GREAT DEAL OF SUPPORT, AND HAD A SENSE OF HUMOR ABOUT THE WORK WHICH MANY ARTISTS AND ADMINISTRATORS DID NOT. I ASKED HIM IN THE SECOND WEEK WHETHER PHYSICAL PLANT HAD COLLABORATED IN THE INSTALLATION, BY CONSTRUCTING A FENCE, WITH FLORESCENT FLAGS AROUND THE PERMENANT SCULPTURE: BEVERLY PEPPER'S "DUNE'S 1". MR. PICKARD CHUCKLED, AND SAID "YES, YOU'RE RIGHT", AND THEN ASKED ME WHETHER THE HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT COULD USE MY SCULPTURES, AFTER I WAS FINISHED.

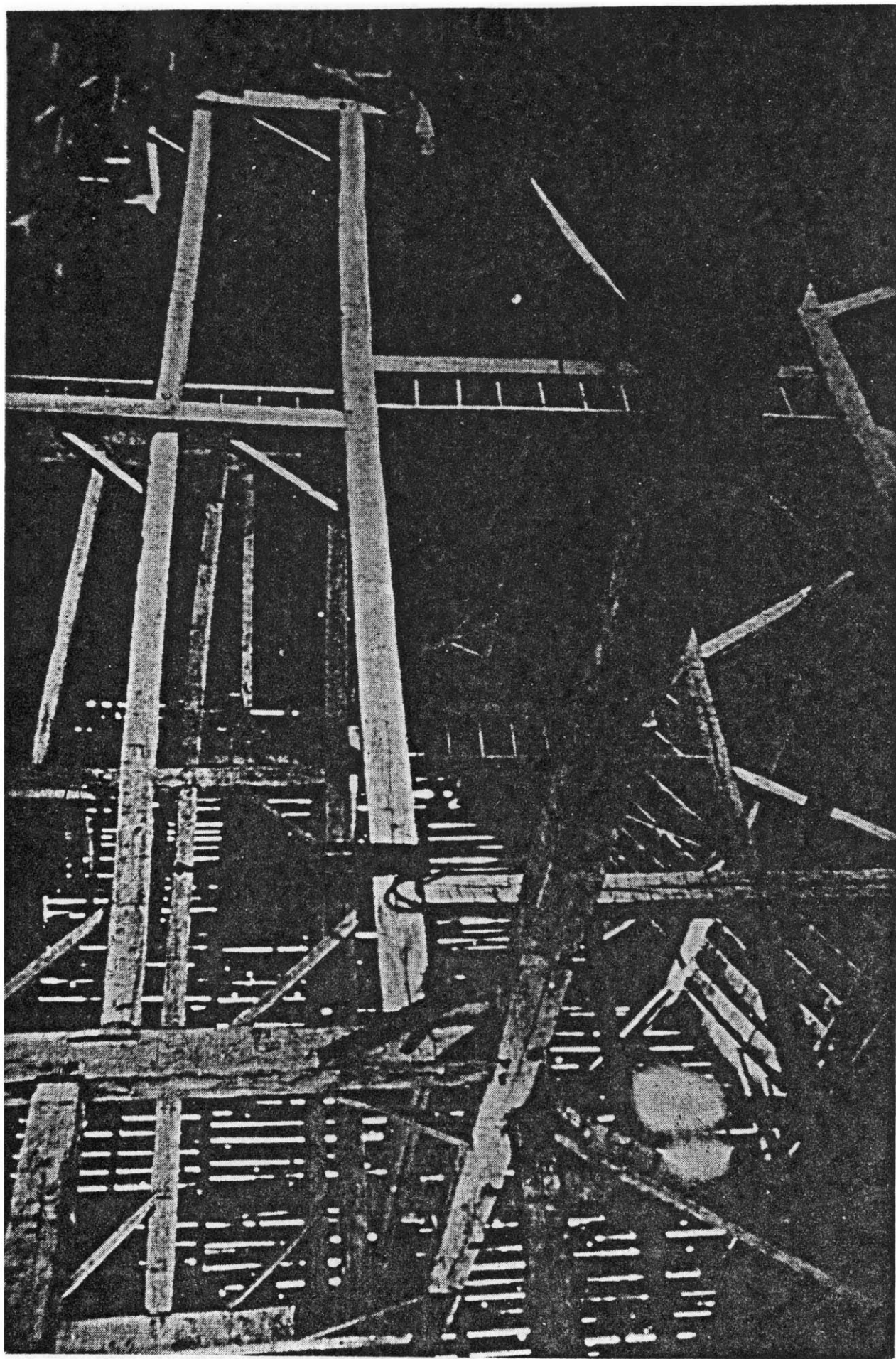


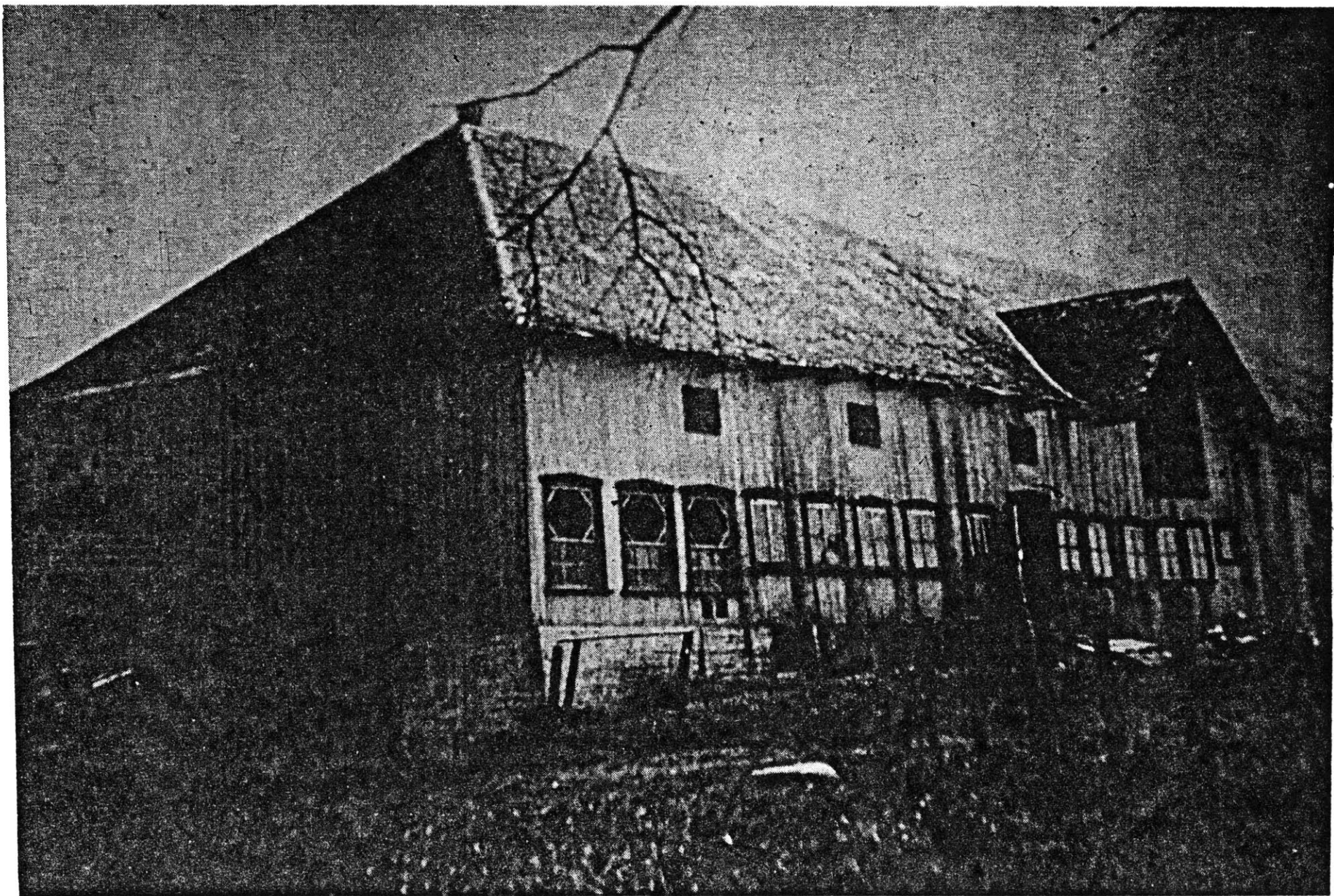
AFTERTHOUGHT

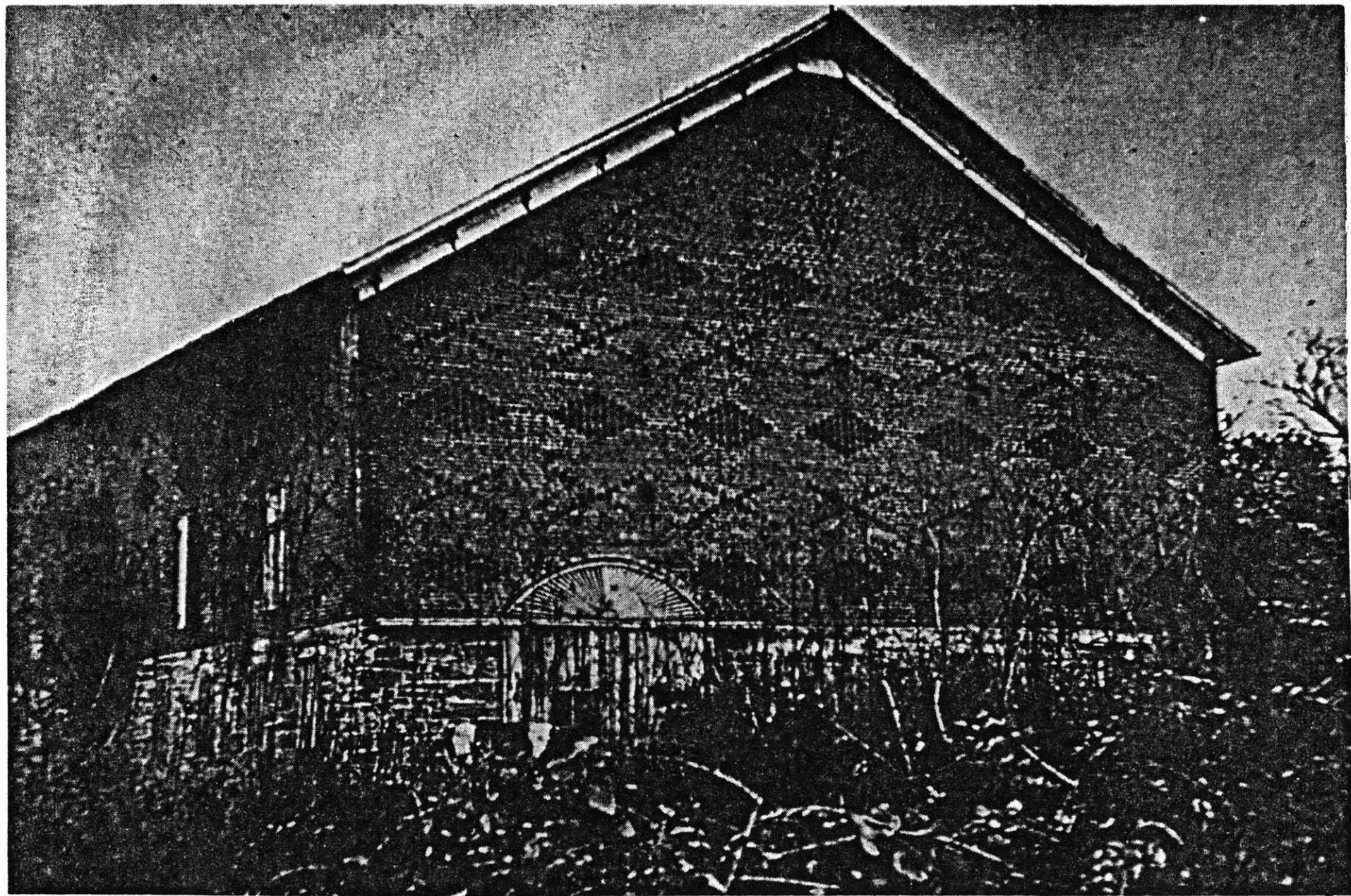
The installation at Compton Court, M.I.T. is my first outdoor, public work. It is a big jump from conceiving work in the studio, and carries with it some of that sensibility. What I have learned from the installation is how to discern a different kind of information than the obvious: how paths are worn, and indicate a different use than planned by the institution; how people view the work from above as well as from the ground; how specific organizations which surround the work direct its meaning (ex. ROTC); how a grounds crew can provide you with a tremendous amount of information: patterns of activity, geography, structure, ect, and finally how people "use" the pieces, the art.

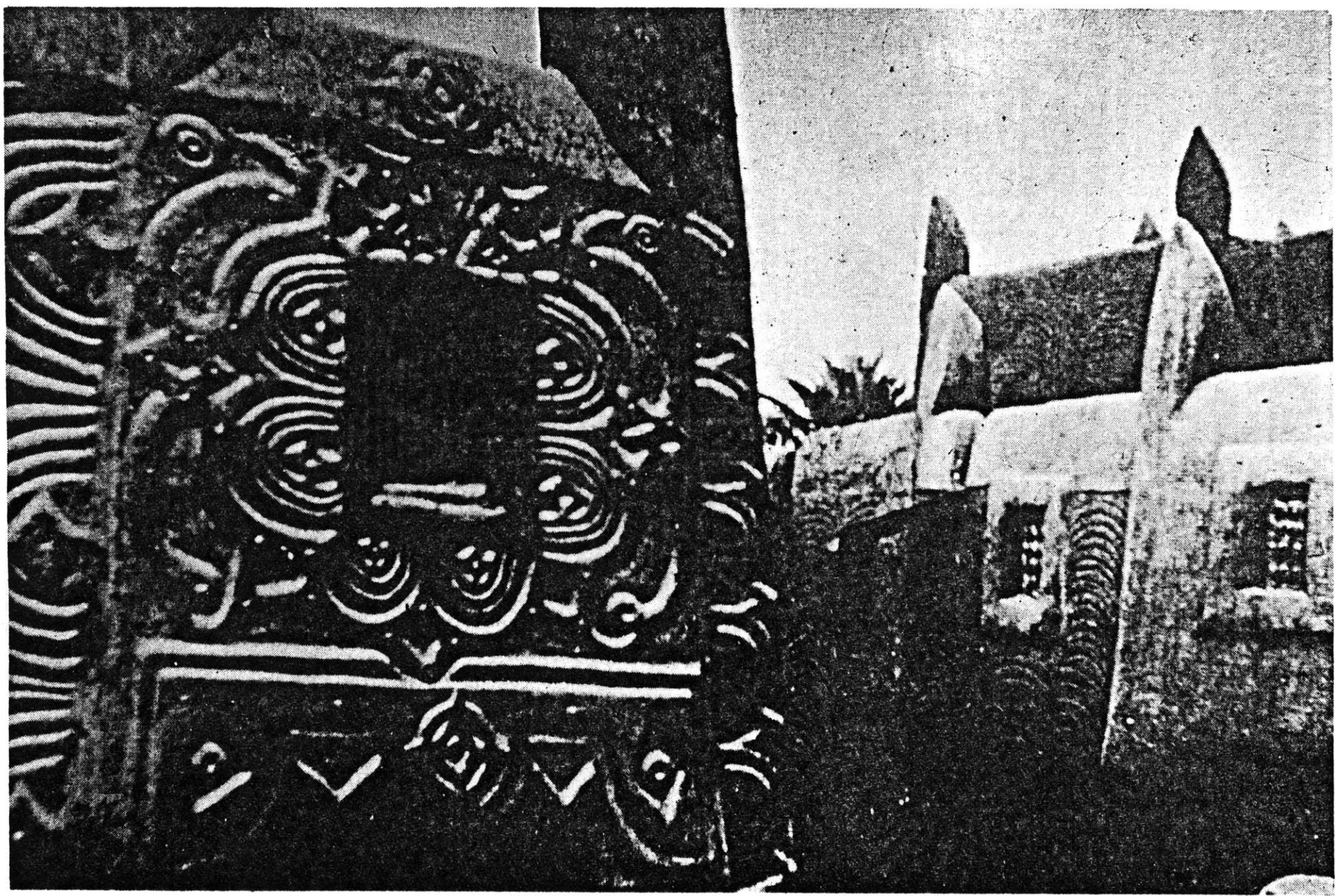
With this installation "Sign Language Exchange", I have realized how difficult my proposition of "public art" is; how it is not a formulation in the studio or in the mind, but also involves the kind of activities which surround and utilize it.



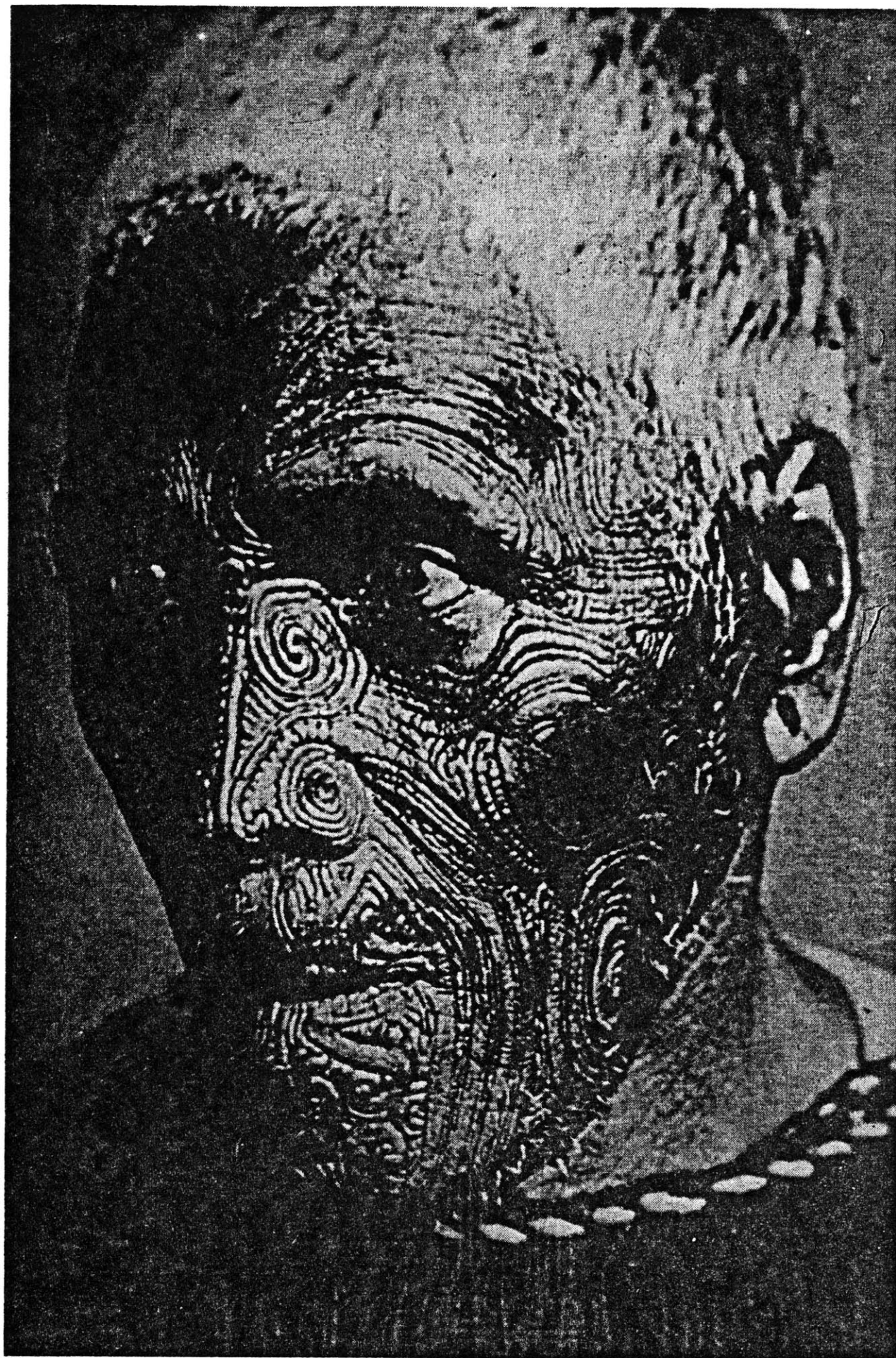












CONCLUSION

If art is the composite of individual experience and social purpose, it must be an active participant in culture. The public institutions which have supported the arts have used arts publicity for their own purposes, have furnished art with their own meanings, have held art back from its public. "Public Art" is an institution in itself; it is trademarked and copyrighted. Much like the interior decorator selects his color and materials to suit his clients, he also selects ART-IN-PUBLIC-PLACES. Although public support for the Arts has soared in the last few years, its purpose has remained the same: better profits, better public relations. Public foundations base their policies on values of "excellence" and "professionalism", and so shelter art by an in-house definition.

The separation of the fine and applied arts place painting in the gallery, sculpture in the courtyard, graphics in the magazine, and view architecture and design as "problem-solving" activities. It labels artists "creative geniuses" and architects and planners "serious social scientists". This rigid interpretation of the artist renders him/her socially useless, and elevates the activity to the metaphysical, the transcendent, the esoteric. Art is then interpreted as a private dialogue, and ideal, a gift. In the separation of the fine and the applied arts, their purposes are in competition, at odds, and often in direct confrontation with each other.

We need an art which is capable of communicating to a public; an art which is experiential and provides new social images and memories. We need an art which speaks from many viewpoints and many cultures. We need a local art which does not aspire to everything and everyone. Finally we

need an art which evolves and changes through its participants.

I believe in the creating of a social art, by blurring the catagories between design and the fine arts, a more meaningful art is possible. We need to take art back from its own formalism, and commericalism. We need to give art back to its public.

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